

### The potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning: applications and adaptations

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The potential of

# Collective Memory-Work

as a method of learning

APPLICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS



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Unless reference is made to English publications all quotes from German originals in the text have been translated by me.

Robert Hamm, Sligo 2021

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# 1 WORKING COLLECTIVELY WITH INDIVIDUAL MEMORIES

When people hear the term »collective memory work« first associations are often connected to grand historical events and their preservation in the cultural memory of a nation. In Ireland, where I am located while writing this book, such events include the famine, the proclamation of independence, the civil war, to name but a few. Each nation and indeed each social group has their own historical points of reference. They are regularly marked by celebrations, reflections, and media attention.

This book is about something else: Collective Memory-Work<sup>1</sup> as a method of learning and research. Central for this method is the connection and the reciprocity between individuals and society. It is based on the *collective work* with *individual memories*. It requires a group in which the individual experiences of the group members in relation to a shared topic are taken as starting point to understand modes of societalization. This term depicts an enhanced understanding of the process of becoming (and remaining) a member of a given historically and spatially located society. It relates to a distinction that is made in the German language.

"The word 'social' has two distinct expressions in German: *sozial* and *gesellschaftlich*. While both words are commonly translated as 'social,' this obscures a significant distinction. By far the majority of animal species can be described as social, including humans. But social is a biological characteristic that is determined by its genetics and is therefore subject to evolution. A species of wasps, for example, is social in a predictable way wherever it is found in the world. Moreover, it is social in probably much the same way now as it was perhaps thousands of years ago. In a broad sense, humans are also social in a way that transcends place and time, but we note as well that this characteristic differs significantly in different time periods and from place to place. We speak of this aspect of sociality as 'culture.' The cultures of people living now are very different from those living centuries ago. Indeed, we know that cultures can change radically within a single lifetime. In short, this aspect of the humanly social has history, and it is this historically determined sociality, or culture, that for humans has largely replaced biology (i.e. genes) as the storehouse of the information needed for us to become truly human. All this difference from the wasp is captured

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1 Capitals because it depicts the proper name of the method.

in the German term *Gesellschaftlichkeit*. The most adequate translation of its adjectival form, though seemingly awkward, is 'societal'" (Tolman 2019:18-9).

Societalization includes a definite surplus when compared with the commonly used notion of socialization. It relates to the process in which the individual actor is *inter- and transacting* with a given socio-historical environment, and by doing so becomes *this particular person within these particular circumstances*. Understanding this interwovenness is at the heart of Collective Memory-Work.

Over the last number of years I have studied Collective Memory-Work intensely, its theoretical background but also in practical applications with a great variety of groups, e.g., a drama group in a community project, informal groups in political contexts, deputy managers of childcare facilities, trainees in vocational schools, seminars with academics of various disciplines.

In the chapters in this book I will attend to the potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning, its adaptation to local circumstances and interests, and its international dissemination. Remarks on the development of the method will provide a historical context and explain its basic assumptions. I will describe procedures in applying Collective Memory-Work and look at problem areas that can become relevant for anyone who wishes to use the method.

Collective Memory-Work follows a sophisticated plan. In many conversations with people who have an interest in the method I learned that it is useful to: a) on the one hand praise and present the complexity of the method, but also: b) do so in a way that bridges from theoretical explanations to everyday experiences. The effect is startling. At the end of such a conversation it is no longer: *You should* try it yourself. It is rather: *I want* to try that myself. This experience guided me while writing this book. It includes chapters in which the complexity of the method is depicted in accessible language. It also includes dialogues that function as the said bridge. They are based on the numerous conversations that I had over the last couple of years. In the book they appear as a series of subsequent scenes. One of those shall be the entry point right now.

## 1.1 IN THE TRAIN

Paul was traveling by train recently when he overheard a conversation of a man and a woman who sat nearby.

He: What do you think of the latest circular? I have learned it off by heart already.

She: Are you serious?

He: Sure. It is the first circular that I read to the end. Normally I stop after the first two pages because I can't stand their pathetic sermons. But this sounds different. Here, listen: *The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.*<sup>2</sup>

She: Well done. And are you actually aware where that comes from?

He: This comes from the coordination committee. It was circulated two weeks ago to all groups with the proposal to start local steering groups for change.

She: Maybe so, and it is probably not too important who exactly wrote those sentences first.

He: Not really, important is that we get going.

She: But do you know where you are going? And who goes with you? And what you are trying to find where you are going?

He: Ah, will you stop. We are going to get going. Everything else will come along the way. The point is that the educator needs to be educated himself.

She: Well, here is the first issue already. If the educator is constructed as solely male as in the quote from Marx's Feuerbach Theses that you so nicely recited just now, I am obviously not included. Here is something to think about for you and for your coordination committee. And anyway,

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2 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>

changing circumstances and self-changing, that has to be understood as practice on all levels of human activity, work, family, politics, even the basketball club. That is all connected. Get going is important. But get going without mapping the starting point, the coordinates of the terrain and the direction to go. Forget it, you will only go in circles.

Paul was hooked. The two had not made an attempt to keep their conversation concealed.

Paul: That is very interesting. If you don't mind, I heard you talking. I am an adult educator and in our area many attempts are made to work in exactly this direction. Many of us hope to change the world by changing the people.

She: Changing the world is one thing, changing circumstances is another one. The world changes constantly because matter always moves. What we are concerned with is the changing of circumstances. It concerns the social relations.

Paul: Maybe you are interested to hear a bit about a method that is probably quite compatible with your efforts? It is a way to dissect patterns of societalization, and consequently gain increased clarity of one's current position in relation to social relations.

She: Sounds interesting. We are in the train for a while. I am Maggie.

He: John.

Paul: Pleasure, I'm Paul.

Maggie: Go ahead, Paul, all ears.

Paul: Best is an example. Consider a couple of teachers who in their everyday practice in schools often feel alienated because there are so many written and unwritten rules, norms, rituals and conventions to adhere to.

John: The hidden curriculum.

Paul: Kind of, yes. Let's assume they come together on invitation and the invitation stated as the topic something like *ritualized behavior in school - the everyday grind on all fronts*. Now they meet, maybe 6 or 7 together in a community center, or in a staff room of one of their schools on a Wednesday evening, but definitely in a quiet space without distraction. They start with an exchange on their motivation to come to the meeting,

and with a discussion about their individual understanding of the topic. With the rituals that can be ideas like, what actually makes behavior into ritualized behavior, or what they think are the fronts they encounter. Based on this initial discussion they formulate a topical focus for their further group work. This can be a statement, or a guiding question that will function as a point of reference later on.

Maggie: That reminds me of Stephen Brookfield. He says we should not assume that just by putting a bunch of teachers into a room and telling them to reflect on their practice the amount of critical reflection in the world would increase.<sup>3</sup>

John: That's the same everywhere. In our trade union meetings, what we do most is load off the shit that happened at work, personal stories, sometimes even outright gossip.

Paul: Of course, that's normal. It would also happen with the teachers in my example. They even start deliberately with their own stories. But at the same time they will keep this inevitable phase at the beginning of their meeting short enough.

The door of the carriage opened and two conductors came in: "Tickets please, tickets." Paul, Maggie and John got out their tickets, handed them to one of the conductors who crossed them out and handed them back.

John: Isn't that another ritual? Daily grind. Public transport should be free of charge.

Paul: And yet, we pay. We hold the tickets ready for inspection. We hand them over. We even thank the conductor for crossing them out.

Maggie: (laughs) There is no point in waging war at the conductors.

Paul: It needs the right time and the right place. But let me come back to the teachers. They have agreed on a topical focus, maybe something like, what are the effects of ritualized behavior in school? What they do next is, they go back to their personal stories.

John: Gossip?

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3 Brookfield (1995:142)

Paul: No, not gossip. They transfer the guiding question into a writing topic for a short personal story which all of them are going to write individually. These are stories of situations in which they were personally involved. For instance, if their writing topic is "Parent Teacher Meeting," then all of them are going to write a story from their own memory about an experience during a parent teacher meeting. The writing topic can also be formulated as a sentence, like, *A situation where I reprimanded a student*, or, *A time when a ritual in school got bastardized*.

John: So, they are writing their stories down?

Paul: Yes, short memory-scenes, maybe a page or two, not longer. In them they try to capture as much as possible what happened at the time. They also avoid including interpretations or reflections on the remembered events. Simply write what happened.

Maggie: Leaving out interpretation and reflection, well, that's a task. Does it mean, they try to write a neutral account?

Paul: The others in the group will read the story. It is mainly for trying to avoid setting them up to accept a specific interpretation or judgment. The method also uses a trick, if you like. The memory-scenes are written in third person singular. That means, if I was to write a story about a personal experience that I had in the past I would not write in the form of *I did such and such*. I rather use the form of *he did such and such*. In some cases groups use a pseudonym. I could for example write about *Michael did such and such*, instead of Paul.

John: That sounds a bit strange. Why should I write about myself without using my own name?

Paul: The memory-scenes are used as material for analysis, the stuff to dig into for mapping the terrain that Maggie mentioned earlier on. If a story is still emotionally laden for the author it can be difficult to allow for the analytic process to go undisturbed. The third person writing helps to establish a distance.

John: So, is it therapy that you are talking about, analysis and all?

Paul: No, it is not therapy. The analysis is of a text, not of a person. At the same time for someone being a member of such a group it may have a therapeutic effect. But that is something different. Even your union meetings will have a therapeutic effect sometimes.

John: Yes, they have. Even gossiping can be therapeutic for those who do it.



Maggie: When I'm walking through the forest, that ain't therapy either. But for me it can have a therapeutic effect.

Paul: That's the same for the teachers in our example. They want to look at the reciprocal linkages, connections between society and individual. With the third person writing one can already take an outside stance. This remembered scene becomes estranged, more like a questionable experience instead of a recount that is oh so familiar, coherent and we know anyway who is the good, the bad and the ugly in it. And finally, the third person accounts are also a means to duly represent the supra-individual elements of individual experiences.

John: Supra-individual?

Maggie: In each individual experience there is more than just the individual experience. As human beings we are biologically single entities, but at the same time we are social entities. Do you remember the other of Marx's theses? *The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.*<sup>4</sup>

Paul: That is very close to the thoughts of those who developed the method. They were a group of Marxist-Feminists in the 1980s who worked together over a couple of years. They were kept together mainly by Frigga Haug. She is also the one who has written and edited a large amount of literature on the method I am talking about. They called their project *Frauenformen*, a name inspired by the French philosopher Lucien Sève and his theory on forms of individuality.<sup>5</sup> They called their method Collective Memory-Work.

John: Collective Memory-Work? I would have thought of anniversaries of important dates in history, D-Day, Haymarket Affair, 9-11, what have you.

Paul: That's the same with most people. There is no copyright on the name. Here it refers to working collectively with individual memories.

Maggie: And yet, as you say yourself, personal memories are more than personal only, they must necessarily contain these supra-individual elements. The personal is political, it is also historically specific. Isn't there 200 years history of state's regulated education in a story about a parent teacher meeting?

Paul: Sure, that brings us back to the third person stories. The group reads and analyses them with the interdependency of personal and political in

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4 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>

5 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/seve/works/1974/ch3/3.2.2.htm>

mind. In concrete terms, let us go back to our teachers. They have written their stories now.

John: Hold a second. How long do they actually meet. You said, this is a Wednesday evening. They had a day in school, maybe did some preparation for Thursday, maybe had to go shopping, some may even have a family at home.

Paul: These teachers are not superhuman. They are tired after a while. Two hours probably, then they have enough. But they allow for going slow with their shared work. In a best case scenario they have made it as far as the guiding question in their first meeting. Maybe they didn't even reach that point. They may find in the initial discussion that their ideas are too diverse and need clarification. But then, they have their next meeting a fortnight later where they pick up the strings.

John: So you're talking about a group that meets on a regular basis over a period of time.

Paul: Did I forget to say that? Collective Memory-Work needs time.

Maggie: Can be an obstacle.

Paul: If you are a member of a football team, or if you are in the local film society, or you do whatever else, work in your parish if you're a religious person, it always needs time. It wouldn't be different in a steering group for change either.

John: No, it wouldn't. A matter of preferences, I guess, decisions and commitment.

Maggie: OK., I understand they have written their stories. But do they sit together in a room to write them. That sounds a bit odd, nearly like an exam in school.

Paul: Some groups actually did that. Not all in the same room, but in the same venue. But they had different time regimes, restricted to a day-seminar or so. Normally the writing happens at home. Between two meetings.

John: I guess you have done that yourself already, haven't you?

Paul: Yes. I have. And with the writing, what happens to me is, I always let a few days pass after the meeting in which the writing topic is agreed. I always have at least a few stories that pop up in my mind and I try to trace them as good as I can. Which scene? What exactly happened? What else do I remember about it? What fits best with the topic? But I don't leave it

to the last minute either. There are people who say it works best if they are a bit under pressure. There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. What is important is just that the memory-scenes are there for the next meeting.

John: OK., now they have them. Six or seven stories. What do they do with them?

Paul: We read them out aloud. One after the other. After each story we express our immediate reactions to it. We try to figure out what message the authors convey about themselves. And we also try to figure out what common sense theories are contained in the story. We collect all this, write it all down.

Maggie: Are you aware that you changed from they to we?

Paul: Now that you say it. It doesn't matter. For the example of the teachers, I was actually part of such a group.

Maggie: But you are not a teacher yourself.

Paul: No. In this case I was in the group in a role of facilitator. But that is something I may come back to later.

John: What do you mean by common sense theories?

Paul: These are the type of theories that we all have as kind of a shared stock of everyday wisdom without having thought them through. Often they can be expressed in form of proverbs.

John: What comes up must come down.

Maggie: Silence is golden.

Paul: (laughs) The early bird catches the worm. The strange thing is that there is always some element of truth in them. And whether we like it or not, these common sense theories are ingrained in our everyday understanding. With Collective Memory-Work we want to go beyond this everyday understanding. But first we try to identify the author's message and the common sense theory. Otherwise there is always a chance that they interfere with the analytic work. That would have us stuck on the level of truisms. There would be no new perspectives, no insights, nothing that helps to understand better. We want to dissect the building blocks of our self-images, a bit like taking apart a radio.

Maggie: That reminds me of Michel Foucault and his toolbox.

John: Would you enlighten me?

Maggie: Foucault once said in an interview that all his books are like little toolboxes and that people might use his sentences and ideas as screwdrivers or spanners to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including those from which his books have emerged.<sup>6</sup>

Paul: And Collective Memory-Work has been described as adding another dimension to the toolbox, a scalpel to dissect constructions in an act of social searchery.<sup>7</sup> For this the text-analysis is essential. Otherwise you could just as well organize a self-encounter group, or consciousness raising group, or narrative inquiry group, or a union meeting, share stories, listen empathically, express sympathy, whatever.

Maggie: But text-analysis can mean quite different things. There is an eclectic mix with fascinating names like content analysis, depth hermeneutics, objective hermeneutics, documentary method, discourse analysis. What do you do in Collective Memory-Work?

Paul: Every text is made up of sentences. Every complete sentence comprises at least two elements, a subject and a verb, and it expresses a complete thought. This is our first entry into the deconstruction. We look at the way the sentences are constructed. We identify who are the various subjects in each sentence, and we collect for each of these subjects what verbs the author has used in connection with them.

John: Peter drinks a lot. Peter is the subject. Drinks is the verb. What do I gain from knowing that?

Paul: If the story is about Peter, there will most likely be more than one verb attributed to him. The collection of Peter-verbs in the story is an indicator of the construction of Peter as a character. Plus, there may also be Susan or Jill in the story. If they appear as subjects in sentences the verbs attributed to them are similarly collected. By comparison then we can detect the various characterizations that the author has worked into the story.

John: But do we not know that already when we hear the story? Isn't it very obvious what type Peter is, or Susan or Jill?

Maggie: And why the verbs and subjects?

Paul: The complete sentences are the backbone of the story. They are what makes the story in the first place. You would be surprised how revealing this collection can be. I remember a story of a teacher who wrote a

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6 Foucault (1996:149)

7 Hamm (2011)

memory-scene about the visit of an inspector. On first reading everyone thought, oh, the poor fellow, this inspector is just awful.

John: (laughs)

Maggie: No reason laughing here now.

John: But you are a school inspector.

Paul: Oh, I'm sorry.

Maggie: Not at all. I can well distinguish, stories, realities, daily grind.

Paul: In this story the inspector seemed to be a picture-perfect mean guy. But when the verbs were collected it transpired that the teacher himself did not appear as subject in the sentences at all. It was a superb text. The author had literally made him and his actions a void. Instead it was the inspector who was assigned the status of active subject throughout. And the verbs assigned to the inspector showed a bandwidth that contradicted the picture of him that was initially evoked. He rather showed the characteristics of a bureaucrat, doing his job, ticking boxes. Plus, the author had created several sentences in which the active subject were abstract entities like, the morning progressed slowly, lunch time came, the afternoon stretched out long, or so. That does something to the reader. It creates an impression of fate, of hopelessness. After all, what can you do against the afternoon stretching?

Maggie: Are you saying this teacher made himself invisible in his text, and by doing so he focused the attention of the readers solely on the supposedly mean inspector?

Paul: Yes. That became clear when the list of subjects and verbs was compiled. It had a real aha-effect not only for the group members, but also for the author himself. A simple exercise but very effective.

Maggie: I can picture it. The mechanisms that we apply in our constructions of stories are suddenly visible.

Paul: Yes. But subjects and verbs are only the start. We also look for emotions of the figures in the story, and for motivations that are expressed. We remain extremely close to the text in this part. On the one hand this is very simple, on the other hand for some people who do it the first time it can be tempting to read something into the text that isn't there. But most people get the idea quite fast and after a few times doing it they are OK with it.

Maggie: When I think of a memory that I would write down, in many cases there would be other people in the story. For myself I may be able to recall emotions and motivations, but for the others?

John: Sure you know if the teachers you met in a school were angry to see you.

Maggie: Most teachers are not angry to see me, some are frightened but they try not to show it.

Paul: And if you were to write a story about visiting a school you would be able to describe how they express their emotions.

Maggie: Granted. But motivations? They are so much hidden. The idea of open communication may be quite nice, but real life is different. The starting points for people to communicate with each other are connected to the power structures in which the communication is situated.

John: Obviously I won't talk straight with my boss as long as there is a risk to get fired.

Paul: In most cases motivations are in fact not expressed. Either way, looking in the texts for motivations opens our view for considering exactly the situatedness of the situation. Take the story with the teacher who made himself invisible. The inspector in this story was examining the teacher for his diploma. And at the end of the day the inspector refused to grant the diploma to the teacher.

Maggie: For what reasons?

Paul: That was another void in the story. The teacher didn't tell us about the reasons. But he wrote that the inspector did not outright fail him, instead he said to the teacher that he would report back that the diploma would be deferred, which would look not as bad in the teacher's file. Although the story did not give us clear information why the inspector would not let the teacher pass the diploma, his motivation for not letting the teacher fail completely was stated.

John: Teachers pass and fail as it suits the economy. When there is a shortage of teachers in schools they let all sorts of folks have a go at the children. When money gets tight in the budgets, the screws are tightened also on teachers entering the job.

Maggie: It is probably a bit more complex, but yes, that is part of the situatedness. The economic and political situation at a given time plays a

role even on the micro-level of human interaction during a school visit. I am bound to certain protocols, if I ignore them I set myself up for trouble.

Paul: The daily grind. There is a lot of contradiction in everyday live. We are often aware of the lines of tension. But at the same time we push this awareness aside. No surprise our memory-scenes contain many white spots, vacuums, kind of knowledge not acknowledged, often with the peculiar effect of confirming that we couldn't act differently, that there is no other way, that we have no options and so on. But this construction ties us to a victim position. The worst in it is that this position paralyses us. The white spots, by the way, are also an important feature in our text-analysis.

John: I nearly forgot, you were telling us about your method.

Paul: Well, it's not my method. It was developed by the women's collective around Frigga Haug. But, when I think about it, who owns a method anyway? Isn't it always those who apply it at a given time? They will do with it what fits their purposes. That is appropriation and hence it is their method. Where were we? Text-analysis. We read the stories, find the message of the author and common sense theories, then we do the grammatical deconstruction, subjects, verbs, emotions, motivations. We are looking for contradictions, white spots, clichés and language peculiarities.

John: What do you mean by peculiarities?

Paul: That concerns all aspects in relation to the use of language in the text of a story that the group finds worth noting. For example, if a text is written with lots of direct speech, this is a peculiarity. The texts are remembered scenes. Often the actual situation dates back a significant amount of time. Who would be in a position to recount a dialogue they had a few years ago in the exact wording?

Maggie: You said earlier that you try to capture this in your own memory.

Paul: That's right. But can I be sure? I can get the gist of it, sometimes I come as far as remembering a particularly strong sentence, a curse, a yell. But a whole conversation as we have it here? No chance. And yet, some texts are full of direct speech. The effect is to evoke an impression of authenticity.

John: It's a bit like a cover-up, isn't it?

Paul: The writers don't write deliberately to cover up. It is a mechanism they have chosen because to them it seemed the best way to get their message across.

Maggie: Another mechanism could be if something is repeated a few times in a story. That is often done in report writing on school visits. You say it in the introduction, then you say it in the descriptive part, and then you repeat it again in the evaluation.

John: To hammer it down.

Maggie: The inspectorate wouldn't use this type of terminology.

John: The inspectorate wouldn't. But I would.

Paul: Maybe we should have a short break, I think I need to go to the toilet.

Maggie: (laughs) Best practice, like in secondary school.

Paul: (laughs) Sure, we all learned our lessons well.

When Paul came back John just finished his sandwich. Maggie sipped tea from a cup that she had filled from a flask.

Paul: It is only two more stops before I have to leave. Should I try to wrap up a little bit what comes after the deconstruction of the texts?

John: Go ahead.

Paul: We write all the elements that we detect in the deconstruction on posters that we put up on the wall. It is a bit like a house that was built from toy blocks, and now all the blocks are spread out beside each other. Suddenly it becomes visible that the house could have been built differently. And with this spread out in front of us we also look for an extended description of the figures that takes into account their entire characteristics and the way the author has constructed them.

John: Which also includes camouflage.

Paul: If you want to use this word. There is in every story more than what you get in the first reading. Sometimes this is a slight shift in the message, sometimes it can add up to a completely new interpretation.

Maggie: That all sounds like an intense way of self-reflection together with others.



Paul: Collective Memory-Work is more than self-reflection. At the very beginning the group had an introductory discussion about their topic. In the writing of the stories a connection between theory and practice was made. After analyzing a story, this connection needs to be revisited. Every single text-analysis will add something to the overall understanding. At the end of each text-analysis a transfer from the story back to the guiding question needs to be made.

Maggie: And in that manner you leap from one story to the next, am I right?

Paul: Yes. It is a process of subsequent progress, step by step.

Maggie: You spoke about time earlier on, and how this is a slow process. That all sounds like a good bit of work, and you also want to be able to keep on track.

Paul: Time is important. For a thorough text-analysis it is necessary to allow two hours on average.

John: You said the stories are maybe a page or two long. That seems a lot of time to talk about such a short story.

Paul: Only if you haven't done it yet.

John: I can't argue that one. Just to get it right, you were talking about this group meeting on a Wednesday evening. How many meetings would they need to go through all their stories? I suppose they have their initial discussion, then they have a day where they read all their stories, then they take the stories in turns and so on. It easily comes to nine or ten meetings.

Paul: And probably even a few more if they decide to read an essay, watch a film, visit an exhibition, or attend a public talk that relates to their topic.

John: And who does that?

Maggie: I could see all sorts of groups doing it. Not only for teachers, I guess it would equally be an option for you and your union meetings.

John: We have a good few people in our local group who, I bet, don't read anything but the tabloids. I am pretty sure that if I came to them with the idea of writing stories, and doing text-analysis they would tell me a nice but firm "get lost."

Paul: It might be worth a try. One of the first groups that started doing this type of work was a group of women in trade unions. Their starting position was the experience that as women in their respective unions they were not taken serious, their viewpoints not respected, their demands belittled and

so on. As a way out of the frustration in their daily grind in the union they started looking at their stories, how they were part of a larger structure, and what point of intervention they could find.

Maggie: Trade unions as part of social progress and at the same time hotbed of patriarchal traditions and sexism. But John was saying about the writing, and how the method is text-heavy, and that it might be an obstacle.

Paul: I have heard that from a lot of people already. There are two things to say about it. Take the trade union women. There were nine of them, aged 27 to 47. They had diverse jobs as childcare workers, librarian, shop floor staff in a candy factory, secretaries, others were nurses, third level lecturer or sales rep. From the outset some of them had a greater affinity than others to working with text, writing, reading, analyzing. But that is turned into an advantage it they make available to the group their experience and knowledge. It means, making yourself useful for the progress of everyone. Frigga Haug frequently uses the term of the organic intellectual to describe this role in the Collective Memory-Work groups.

Maggie: That is Gramsci.

Paul: Yes. Others speak of facilitation, and how important a good facilitator can be for a group. With good facilitation it is possible for groups of people who initially don't trust their own ability. They learn fast what to look for in the texts, all they need to bring is a healthy curiosity.

Maggie: That is what we tell the teachers all the time. That they should be more reflective in their practice, and that they should allow their curiosity to take them into new areas of interest.

John: And do they listen to you?

Maggie: They listen, but often only because they have to. If you come into a school with your inspector hat on, whatever you say is filtered through these lenses. There is the rare occasion where you meet teachers who are different. Mostly it is very ritualistic. Everyone plays in the frame of protocol. Everyone is polite, or at least tries to be. And everyone is fairly guarded trying not to show too much for fear of being criticized.

Paul: Does that include yourself?

Maggie: It actually does. Just as ritualistic, just as guarded.

Paul: Sure. Look, before I leave the train I give you this.

Maggie: Your contacts, oh, thanks.

John: Weren't there two things you wanted to say about the writing as obstacle?

Paul: You're right. The group composition, organic intellectuals and facilitation is one. The other one is that the writing is actually quite easy. Nobody asks for a scientific essay or an entire novel. All that is asked for is a memory-scene of one or two pages. With a bit of courage anyone can do that. Plus, the work with the text is done in a group.

John: Sure it is done in a group. Why do you say that again?

Paul: Because it is important. For many people, why do they have this fear of engaging with text?

John: School. They never learned it properly.

Paul: For an answer that came like a shot. But in Collective Memory-Work the group is a factor of support, of solidarity.

Maggie: As far as groups are concerned, they can be both solidarity and intimidation.

Paul: If a group intimidates you, how long would you want to stay in this group?

Maggie: Suppose so. But not everyone can leave a group at any time.

Paul: In Collective Memory-Work you can, that is one of the basic conditions.

Maggie: That would mean you couldn't do it in a work environment.

Paul: It depends. If people have a true choice, you can. Where they haven't, it will be difficult, and in fact it may not be possible or the learning experiences are different.

John: That is everywhere the same. I could not order my work colleagues to be a member of a steering group for change. I rely on them coming voluntarily to join. Which brings me back to the circular, changing circumstances and self-changing. I see the self-changing, but how does your method then change circumstances?

Paul: You can't play them out against each other. There isn't a panacea for changing circumstances. We talk about social relations also. The wire cutter can be as necessary as the picket line or work to rule. The most important tools for change are always the people. Whatever you do, if you have mapped out the terrain properly, chances are that not only can you get going, but going somewhere. And if we understand ourselves and our

self-constructions as part of the coordinate system, it allows us to find a better stance.

Maggie: If that teacher who made himself invisible overcomes his fixation with the inspector, wouldn't that allow him to also deal with my next visit differently?

Paul: On a very simple level, yes. But it could equally allow him to push in the teachers union for a structural review of the inspectorate.

Maggie: And he would have my support.

Paul: That sounds like a fair conclusion. I need to go. Nice talking to you.  
John, Maggie. Maybe we see each other in the future.

Maggie: Thanks.

John: Good Luck.

With this Paul got up and made his way to the exit doors while the train slowly came to a halt.

\*

John, Maggie and Paul will appear later again in the book. In the next chapter the introduction to Collective Memory-Work that was woven into their conversation shall be extended from a slightly more theoretical perspective. Subsequently then international applications of the method will be described.

Central in Collective Memory-Work is the connection and reciprocity of individual and society. The development of the method by groups of women since the late 1970s was firmly anchored in the women's movement. Its historical background is explained by Frigga Haug in a number of publications (1999a, 2015, 2018). From the outset she has been the main driving force behind the continuous efforts to develop Collective Memory-Work. In her books she also lays out the foundational principles on which the method rests.

An important question in the development of Collective Memory-Work concerned the relation between experience, knowledge, theory and praxis. In an early publication from 1980 that was published as part of a nationwide initiative in Germany aimed at establishing a series of seminars as *women's foundational studies* it is put into context:

"In women's seminars in the past . . . it was obvious: One group of the women came with the idea that the seminar would eventually be the place in the university where they could bring in their personal experiences. Dealing with theory they found too aloof. It had nothing to do with them and therefore they strictly rejected it. They wanted to feel good and create a personal climate. In their opinion this was not possible by a joint effort of appropriating theory. The other group of the women however wanted to deal with theory only. They saw experiences as redundant. The conflict between the two positions, either directly learning from personal experience or learning only from theory, made working conditions more difficult for everyone." And the authors add: ". . . not all women were interested in the experiences of the others. The result: great dissatisfaction on the side of all participants and a shrinking of the seminar to only half of the women. Unfortunately at largely this point we had stopped questioning and clarifying what significance our personal experiences have, what and in what form they can contribute to our analysis of contexts, connections and interrelations, and therefore bring to the fore possibilities for change. We suggest to address the significance and usefulness of experiences at the beginning of the seminar so that these problems don't impede on it for weeks. . . . For clarification in our discussion we defined the terms experience, knowledge, theory and praxis.

- Experience is the process of experiencing itself.
- Knowledge means comprehending the construction, structure, and the becoming.
- Theory builds on experience, but it is not the same as experience; it is its generalization and processing.
- Praxis is the acting of humans."  
(Projekt Frauengrundstudium 1980:8; emph. in original).

What comes across as a conflict at the time between two factions in a seminar points to the more general problem that women's experiences were not represented in social scientific theory. Hence what was at stake was to find an approach by which it was possible to transfer experiences into knowledge, put them into a productive relation to theory and thus gain a basis for developing praxis.

Important was an orientation that was open to both sides. On the one hand: "The methods learned in social sciences treat human beings like objects. In face of the statistic average everyday life loses its meaning. We want to start with the acting people themselves and not study 'them down there' from an elevated outside position. We put our experiences up for discussion in form of stories of the mundane. We want to find possibilities for intervention for women and further develop existing theories of intervention" (Projekt Frauengrundstudium 1982:12).

On the other hand: "Comprehension is not possible on basis of experience only because contradiction as such, e.g. cannot be lived out. In fact, for finding orientation—or to be able to live at all—contradiction in the immediate life is resolved to one side, reframed, put to compromise, repressed etc. Therefore we cannot directly gain knowledge from our own experience. If we were to live out contradiction in reality it would tear us apart, as if we were to go to the right and the left at the same time" (Projekt Frauengrundstudium 1980:10).

The authors called their suggestion to deal with this problem: "Against the lack of concepts of the mundane - Collective Memory-Work" (Projekt Frauengrundstudium 1982:10). They propose to put short descriptions of one's own experiences against the existing theories on a given topic. "Concrete stories of everyday life cannot falsify the theories. But they can act as unwieldy material in relation to the theoretically derived question. They can give important cues that the problem . . . is actually located somewhere else, i.e. our question is not able to capture the 'focal point'.

Stories can signal the need for a problem transfer and a new question that stipulates the newly found connection" (ibid:12; emph. in original)

A critique is made possible of both existing theory and patterns of everyday common sense explanations. If the own life and the experience of contradiction, restriction, self-obstruction, and self-constraint are put into focus, such a critical perspective opens a chance for emancipatory learning that allows to search for new possibilities of action.

The group of female trade unionists that was mentioned by Paul in the train puts it this way: "Our stories show how deeply patriarchal structures . . . determine our lives, restrain our own activities and obstruct us in gaining a self-assured position. In searching for different praxes we discover the strength that lies in the collective work of women. Not because there are no conflicts, but because working through our experiences gradually frees us from the isolation and the finality of our socialization. A support for the analysis of our own positions are the steps for working [with our written stories] that we developed over the course of one year. They hand us criteria for going beyond simply looking at our actions and identifying restraints but also fight against them" (Morisse et al. 1982:643).

As a "call on the many" (Haug 1999a:15) Collective Memory-Work was at the same time an intervention in the politics of the women's movement: working through the own experiences as a chance to overcome a paralyzing victim perspective. It brings into view the own, yet unintended complicity with the very circumstances that are experienced as oppressive. Recognizing one's own contributions to the perpetuation of social constraints opens a potential for changes as referred to by John, Paul and Maggie in the first chapter: changing circumstances and of human activity or self-changing as revolutionary practice.

The groups around Frigga Haug did not restrict themselves to experimenting with the method or publishing their results. As part of the larger movement they offered seminars in which they further promoted and refined the method. As practical implementation of a popular science such seminars would often entail participation of women from all walks of life. They took place well into the 1990s. But also local groups who started working with the method only on basis of available literature could always get in touch with the originators and receive support in their efforts.

In the time between 1980 and 1997 a series of nine volumes was published in Germany with results and reflections on methodology and applications of Collective Memory-Work. The international dissemination of the method

took off particularly with the publication of a translation of the second of these volumes as *Female Sexualization* by Verso in 1987. Another important element in making Collective Memory-Work known beyond the confines of the German speaking countries were the guest lectures by Frigga Haug, e.g. in Australia, Canada, Denmark, USA. In a retrospective synopsis she describes Collective Memory-Work as "in scientific terms a social-psychological research method, in political terms it requires a collective that at least aims at self-liberation, theoretically it builds on previous linkages of various disciplines and key aspects of which cultural theory, ideology theory, Critical Psychology, theory of language are certainly the most important ones. The aim is an extended knowledge about female societalization (albeit that the method is universally applicable) with at the same time an increased capacity for action" (ibid:16)

Originally termed Collective Memory-Work in later publications the method was often simply called Memory-Work. The collective character was always mentioned in methodological contextualizations and methodical descriptions, but in the name used the *Collective* was left out. I am consciously reintroducing it in this book. As will become clear in subsequent chapters the question of working collectively plays an important role in appreciations of the potential as a method of learning.

## **2.1 BASIC IDEAS**

A number of basic assumptions of Collective Memory-Work were mentioned already in the conversation in the train. For a more detailed understanding they shall here be supplemented by a slightly more systematic description. It builds on four theorems that were suggested by Frigga Haug as basics to be discussed in a group prior to starting their work with the self-generated memory-scenes, so "that the members of the group are not necessarily at the mercy of the individual working steps" (Haug 2008:28).

### *Construction of one's own personality*

What we (as of today) understand to be our personality "has a history, a past. We attach meaning to our personas and use this meaning, or understanding of our personality, to determine the steps we take in the near present and distant future." As such we are actively involved in the process of construction of our personality in historically antecedent social



circumstances. Our participation is yet "dictated by our desire to obtain the ability to act and remain able to act" (ibid.).

This process of construction of our personalities is interminable, it continues constantly and is part of our social existence. It includes the negotiation and appropriation of categories of legitimacy for our actions.

#### *Tendency to eliminate contradictions*

In the process of constructing our personalities we "tend to disregard anything that does not fit in with the unified image that we present to ourselves and others" (ibid.).

#### *Construction of meaning*

Meaning is not inherent to things, acts, words. It rests on a process of assigning this meaning. For meaning to be valid it "requires agreement by others. Meaning occurs in the first place through language" (ibid.).

#### *Politics of language*

Language "is not simply a tool that we may use according to our liking. Rather, in the existing language, politics will speak through us and regulate our construction of meaning. Thus culturally a number of ready meanings lie around . . . they push themselves on us when we write and dictate what we might not even have wanted to express. This happens when we less reflectively and more naively use language" (ibid:29).

History is regarded as lived praxis of people with particular (nameable) interests. Current historical and social circumstances are understood as results of earlier struggles, disputes, negotiations on social plane that are solidified in established structures and institutions but also in specific constructions of meaning.

As active actors and negotiators in our own respective constructions of personalities and meaning we are at the same time bound to the scope of negotiations and actions that is possible at a given time in a given space. Hence we don't have at our disposal an unlimited number of possibilities of defining, articulating and shaping our personalities and meaning making. The spectrum of historically possible assignments of meaning mark the boundaries. We have to use existing patterns, forms of thought and action. We can slightly shift them, put them together in new combinations, but we cannot get rid of them completely. Consequently what we experience as unique individual constructions of personality and meaning has always a

double character. They are at once a genuine creative act and at the same time this act differs from similar acts of others only in nuances.

Collective Memory-Work relies on the assumption that by way of analyzing memory-scenes it is possible to bring to our consciousness the lines that we follow(ed) in the meaning making process which determine our everyday praxes. Eventually this can open perspectives for renewed, increased capacity for action. Implicit in this is the basic idea that human action is open to change and can be influenced through (self-)reflection.

## 2.2 VISUALIZATION: WHAT TO DO IN WHAT ORDER

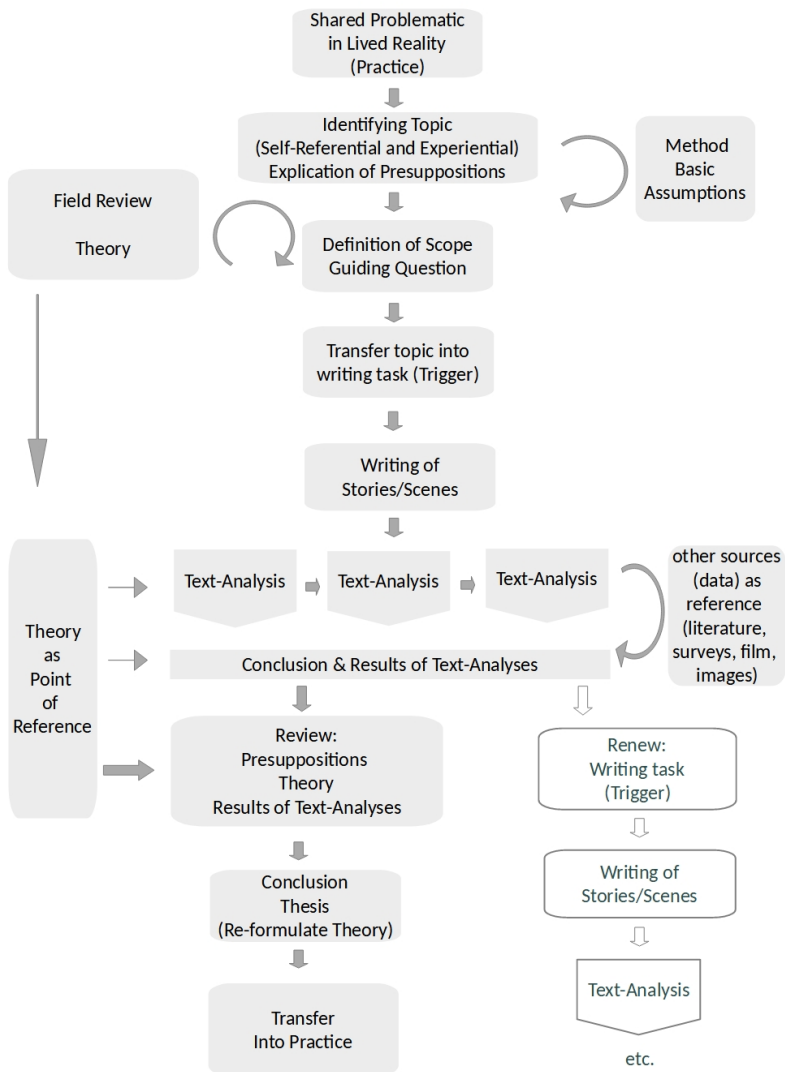
In the train conversation Paul put a particular emphasis on the text-analysis. However, writing and analyzing texts is part of a larger number of procedural steps. Without embedding the work with the texts in such a larger framework it will remain anecdotal and misses the point of Collective Memory-Work.

In addition to the descriptions in the first chapter it is helpful to visualize the different steps and their sequential order. The diagram should be read as depicting a prototypical process of a Collective Memory-Work project. Here it shows *what* is done *when* (*in what order*). In later chapters the questions of *who does it* (*and how*) will be dealt with.

Beginning and end of a project are set in lived reality. The group agrees on a topic for their project on basis of questions (problematic) originating in the concrete spheres of lived experience of the participants. They clarify among themselves their presuppositions in relation to the topic. Comparing existing theories to the participants' experiences and presuppositions helps to define the scope of the project. For this purpose a field review of such theories can take place. Based on the defined scope a guiding question (or questions)<sup>8</sup> are formulated. The group agrees on a writing topic (a trigger word, sentence, heading). Participants write their memory-scenes.

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8 The term 'question' is used here without claiming exclusiveness of format. It is just as well possible for a group to collect a number of reference terms, or a working hypothesis. The advantage of the format of an explicit question is that it provides a stronger focus in later discussions. The disadvantage is that groups can become too fixed on finding an explicit answer instead of being open for topical transfers that would impress themselves during the discussions.



The self-generated texts are used as material for the following text-analyses. During text-analyses the existing theory provides a pool of references that can be tapped into whenever deemed suitable. In addition to the pure textual work it is possible to include other resources to inform the topical discussions. After the text-analyses are concluded the results of the subsequently progressing discussions are brought together and compared to the original presuppositions and the relevant theories. The insights gained in this process build the basis for a concluding project report in which a reformulation of theories is possible.

New insights are transferred into lived reality of participants. New perspectives, changed perceptions, transformed comprehension lead to different positioning and ideally increased capacity for action and search for action possibilities.

The loop for a discussion of basic assumptions can be helpful particularly for groups who work with the method for the first time. It can also be beneficial in groups composed of members from different disciplines, with different traditions of thoughts or worldviews.

Included in the diagram is the possibility to continue with a second (or further) round of textual work, e.g. by agreeing a new trigger and writing new stories. In theory this opening is available after every single round of text-analyses. In practice the time at hand and the interest of participants will determine how feasible such a renewed cycle is.

An element that is missing in the diagram is the possibility for authors to write a second version of their memory-scenes. This is an option in particular where a participant feels "she was misunderstood, did not express herself clearly enough, or where she remembers now that things were different." The group may "instruct her to fill in the vacant spots and make statements about the obvious contradictions." Such a revision can lead the writer to realize from the corrections "that the whole scene does not fit any more. . . . The group will be surprised to see that the opposite of what was initially written has sometimes appeared . . . [and] . . . the leveling of contradictions, the artful vacancies, all of these attempts to make the narrative cohesive now all of a sudden appear fragile" (Haug 2008:39).

The quoted passages clearly point to the character of the work with the texts as a negotiation within the group in search for insights that stretch beyond the level of experience.

## 2.3 REPORTED EXPERIENCES

In Collective Memory-Work the distinction between research and learning disappears. If such a distinction ever makes sense elsewhere, here this is not the case. Collective Memory-Work is research-as-learning, and learning-as-research. The projects of *Frauenformen* were originally initiated from within the Socialist Women's Association in Berlin, but "then continued in a seminar on sexuality and domination at the Free University Berlin [and] as women's studies for more than 10 years at the University Hamburg. [This] was an autonomous seminar fought for and won by students in the department of sociology. It comprised an unpaid lecturing rota. The students got Frigga Haug to facilitate the seminar. It was always a research seminar" (Meyer-Siebert and Schmalstieg 2002:47).

The divide between researcher and researched that is prevalent in traditional science is conceptually abandoned in Collective Memory-Work. Subject and object of research are one (Haug et al. 1987:36). The nine volumes published by *Frauenformen* can be read as a documentation of the research results of the underlying projects. As such they are at the same time collective learning results of the engagement with the respective topics. Beyond the published research results of these projects it is also informative to ask about reflections on individual learning experiences and learning results of the participants in such projects. Karen Haubenreisser and Evelin Gottwalz collected feedback of earlier collaborators of *Frauenformen* on "the Memory-Work seminars . . . the collectives . . . how, in what way have we learned what? What unsettled, what moved us . . . what actually remains still to this day?" (Haubenreisser and Gottwalz 2002:57; emph. in original).

Some typical comments: "[I] learned to think; learned something about myself; got orientation for myself and how circumstances can be changed; learned not to get lost in immediacy; learned not to just concern myself with circumstances but also with myself; learned to correct my own perspective; learned to frame everyday life as insightful." And on learning format and effects: "Frigga Haug and Kornelia Hauser facilitated the projects of *Frauenformen* together. They sat beside each other like fire and earth, stone and iron, emitting sparks, rarely sharing the same opinion, but always sharing the same target. They mastered the interesting art of instructive dispute, thus helping us to develop something collectively. The connection

of the own experience and the structures and things around us triggered immense theoretical excitement in us. When reading a text by Althusser or during empirical analysis of memory-scenes, the feeling to be right at the heart of our own lives and similarly at the core of society gave everything a new meaning. I had not yet an idea what exactly I had to do next. But I was convinced that it was me who had to do it!" (ibid.).

And Frauke Schwarting says retrospectively: "From these projects I gained a particular perspective. I also see it in other women who worked with Frigga and Kornelia at other times. They can be recognized by the way they describe the phenomena in contradiction, they know that development is something quite strenuous and that it can only succeed if there are a few others to your left and right who regularly speak of capacity for action. You also recognize them for their suspicion towards all too cozy thoughts and praxes, against the smooth and the unambiguous, against leaning back in the self-evident like in an armchair. With such a perspective you are never anywhere at home, but you are always on the right track!" (ibid:61).

These responses are noteworthy because they refer to a more general level of experience and insight rather than the respective project theme. Such feedback is not unique however to the members of *Frauenformen*. A group of teachers from Free Alternative Schools writes about their project: "[w]e got wiser as to the constructions of our selves and our acts. We realized that we live in error, that in our efforts to do good and do the right thing we are only scratching the surface of reflections on our being. . . . In working with our stories in the seminar we experienced us as it were from outside. This allows us to understand a societal context that effects our impressions, insights and acts far deeper than we had assumed. . . . We have learned to think in contradictions and to see them as productive." (Lehrende aus Freien Alternativschulen 2007:103)

And slightly more spontaneous, as expressed by participants in a project with deputy managers of childcare facilities.:

"Thanks a lot, that was very . . . different."

"I pay much more attention on how something is written, how something is read, and what it actually means."

"Those blind spots, somehow they are visible now."

"Now we are so de-romanticized and have to go our merry ways."

What is called de-romanticized here is one of the risks of critical reflection that Stephen Brookfield mentions (1995), the feeling of having traded an innocent naivety for a much clearer understanding of a given problem. What

Brookfield terms "lost innocence" is a risk that is actually a gain!

Judith Kaufman and her collective in the United States, a group that worked together for more than seven years on questions of "Women in Science", describe the effect as: "[a] result of this project, we have altered our relationship to traditional science . . . memory-work enabled us to bring science to a personal level of experience. . . . [A]s a result it is now impossible for any of us to conceive of science as we once did" (Kaufman et al. 2003:3). Such a result is very much in line with the intentions or the originators of the method.

All those quotes refer to a potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning that creates effects for participants that stretch well beyond the engagement with a particular project theme. Whether this potential can materialize in a project depends on a number of factors. On this basis a variety of applications of Collective Memory-Work shall be presented in the following chapters.

### 3 AROUND THE GLOBE

It may have been more than 80 days but Collective Memory-Work made it around the globe. An early contact existed at the beginning of the 1980s already between the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham and the group in Berlin and Hamburg. A delegation of the women from *Frauenformen* met members of CCCS who at the time worked on concepts, theories, politics and methods concerning popular memory (Popular Memory Group 1982:205f.). As a result of this exchange a group in CCCS started experimenting with the method (Clare and Johnson 2000).

Throughout the 1980s Frigga Haug promoted Collective Memory-Work during several guest lectures in universities around the globe. Consequently people in these countries who were intrigued by the potential of the method used it in their own contexts, adapted it to local circumstances, organizational frameworks, and the traditions of thought in their respective disciplines and research areas.

A recently compiled bibliography of publications on Collective Memory-Work and its adaptation in English and German<sup>9</sup> lists more than 300 essays and books. The vast majority of these contributions are written by authors and for readers in the academic field. Most of them are only available in academic journals with restricted access. Considering the origins of the method this points to a critical development. For a method that is meant to be a "call on the many" the pure rise in numbers of publications is certainly welcome. For a method that evolves from within a social movement and aims at broad intervention within society at large the restriction to an institutionalized academic environment is a disadvantage. The potential of Collective Memory-Work should not be exhausted in the ping-pong of academic discourse. It rather needs to be popularized, making the various experiences with adaptations of the method in different social contexts widely available and usable: popular science with and for the people.

In most of the English literature there is no reference to the collective when speaking of Memory-Work. This term alone can create confusion. In psychological contexts it can relate to detecting traumatic experiences. It also triggers the association to grand history. Furthermore in cultural studies and social sciences it is used for a range of methods and procedures that are

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9 see: [www.collectivememorywork.net](http://www.collectivememorywork.net)



not immediately linked to Collective Memory-Work (e.g., Kuhn 1995, Radstone 2000). However, all projects mentioned in the following chapters refer directly to it, or they are based on adaptations derived from its tradition.

Inspired by Frigga Haug's guest lectures in Australia a number of women started using Collective Memory-Work for their research. A first study during the late 1980s in which it was used dealt with sexual experiences in light of the spread of HIV (Kippax et al. 1990). Three of the women who collaborated in this project were also involved in the collective that published results of a study on *Emotion and Gender* in 1992 (Crawford et al.). Their book is a frequently cited source in relation to methodical steps in Collective Memory-Work. The authors present a description that is very close to the procedures originally developed by *Frauenformen*. They identify three phases: a) writing of memory-scenes, b) text-analysis, c) further examination and theorizing of the material. For the last phase they describe the concrete steps of work done in their project but for the first two phases they also provide a kind of general guideline that can be used as a template by others.

"The memories are written according to a set of rules. . . .

- 1) Write a memory
- 2) of a particular episode, action or event
- 3) in the third person
- 4) in as much detail as is possible, including even 'inconsequential' or trivial detail (it may be helpful to think of a key image, sound, taste, smell, touch)
- 5) but without importing interpretation, explanation or biography.
- 6) Write one of your earliest memories." (Crawford et al. 1992:45).

In many groups who are guided by these suggestions the last point (the earliest memories) is not adhered to simply because it does not fit in with the topic or the direction of questions asked.

For the text-analysis Crawford et al. state:

- "1. Each memory-work group member expresses opinions and ideas about each memory in turn, and
2. looks for similarities and differences between the memories and looks for continuous elements among memories whose relation to each other is not immediately apparent. Each member should question particularly those aspects of the events which do not appear amenable to

comparison. She or he should not, however resort to autobiography or biography.

3. Each memory-work member identifies clichés, generalizations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphor ... and

4. discusses theories, popular conceptions, sayings and images about the topic.

5. Finally, each member examines what is not written in the memories (but what might be expected to be), and

6. rewrites the memory.” (ibid:49)

The practice of text-analysis will be part of a separate chapter soon. There it will become clear that the questions asked of the memory-scenes can be even more structured.

### **3.1 GIRLS IN THEIR ELEMENTS: WOMEN IN SCIENCE**

One of the projects that relied on *Emotion and Gender* as well as *Female Sexualization* is the collaboration of the group started by Judith Kaufman in Oklahoma. Other members were Margaret Ewing, Diane Montgomery, Adrienne Hyle and Patricia Self. Their project is a well documented example of a group that appropriated Collective Memory-Work solely on the basis of literature available to them<sup>10</sup> and by experimenting with the suggestions therein. Nobody in this group had prior experience with the method, be it in earlier research or exposure to an introduction in a methods seminar. They approached Collective Memory-Work purely auto-didactically. This renders untenable a commonly expressed prejudice about the seemingly too complex nature of the method. Collective Memory-Work may be a complex method, and it may be helpful if there is someone in a group who has already had some experience with it. But complex is not the same as too complex, and this is one of the essential messages that are contained in the descriptions of the group in Oklahoma. A bit of courage and zest for (social-)scientific adventure is all that is needed to get started.

The background for the project of Judith Kaufman and her group is their experience of alienation within institutionalized science. They met at the

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10 Besides *Emotion and Gender* and *Female Sexualisation* they also referred to *Research as Social Change* (Schatz, Walker and Schratz-Hadwich 1995).

beginning of the 1990s. All women had recently started an academic career. Retrospectively they describe their professional environment as "a very male dominant department, and a very male dominant college" (Hyle, Montgomery and Kaufman 2020:348). There they met conventional conceptions of what counts as science and who counts as a scientist, based on quantitative approaches, neglecting aspects of relationship and relying on the divide between researcher and researched (Kaufman et al. 2003: 13ff.).

At the same time they realized that their academic training had left a mark whereby they had internalized exactly these perspectives which they experienced as a chain around their neck. Influenced by feminist debates they were aware that there is no such thing as a space free of power, and that exertion of influence is bound to status. Those who sit in the respective seats at elite universities "constantly police the borders, negotiating what counts and what is good or even valid" (ibid:20).

As women in a male dominant environment they felt intellectually and emotionally isolated, doubting their own status and abilities as scientists. Collectively thinking about their situation helped them to identify their unease as a result of traditional institutionalized science and research. Eventually they started a project together that took this unease as point of departure.

Their initial question was: "What can memory-work tell us about our relationship to nature and therefore to science?" (Kaufman et al. 2003:2). They derived this question from the assumption that the origins of science are bound to observations of empirical (material, natural) phenomena. They hoped to come to a better understanding of their relationship to science by way of a better understanding of their relationship to nature. Hence they directed their attention towards the detection of traces of this relationship in memory-stories. They used "the four classical elements (air, earth, fire, and water) as cues for [their] memories" and later "expanded the cues to include tree; as an organism . . . more closely connected with the living world than are the classical elements" (ibid:2).

In their book from 2003 they describe their way of adapting the method, the results of their study and the theoretical points of reference in it. In their effort to come to a better understanding of their own relationship to nature they refer to three aspects of Lew Vygotsky's social constructivist position, i.e. the distinction between spontaneous and scientific concepts in children's thought, the role of childhood play for developing scientific and

artistic creativity, and the concept of the zone of proximal development (Kaufman et al. 2003:4-5). They suggest that "Haug's (1987) theory of memory-work takes social constructivism an important and critical step further than Vygotsky and his successors. Instead of merely describing how the child appropriates and is constructed by cultural and community values, memory-work asks us to scrutinize those values in ourselves" (Kaufman et al. 2003:5).

The stories which they wrote in their project were all memories from childhood and times of growing up. In them they found elements of hegemonic culture reproduced: racism, classism and heterosexual normativity had left their traces. They detected patriarchal values in the writing about nature and the scientific comprehension and explanation of the world.

"Another theoretical perspective that was helpful both in analysis of the memories and in working through methodological issues was Cataldi's (1993) study of depth and physical distance" in which distance "is more than just the distance from one point to another. It may also encompass emotional depth," a kind of "lived distance" within a social space. "[O]ne kind of lived distance in the academic world entails fear of being revealed as not knowing enough, which may lead us to isolate ourselves from our colleagues. For us, this distance initially functioned as a barrier to understanding each others' stories" (Kaufman et al. 2003:5). That the group was able to overcome this barrier which they had acquired as part of their academic training is a result of the practical collective work, countering the isolation as both condition and result in one.

The group worked together for seven years. Initially they met twice a month, but soon after beginning changed to weekly meetings for the first two years. After Judith Kaufman went to New York to start a new job at Hofstra University the women organized regular online meetings and met in person for week-long research and writing seminars. Such an intense and long lasting collaboration is a feature that has an effect on the potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning. The trust that builds up among the group members allows for an approach towards presumably quite personal issues in the memory-scenes that is investigative, critical, but also understanding and reassuring. Furthermore the lack of time pressure offers the chance to work much more in-depth with the stories and the theories surrounding the topic. Last not least it also makes possible a repeated review and revision of methodical steps and their adaptation.

About 90 memory-scenes were written in the course of the project. The texts covered memories from early childhood up to adolescence. The women recognized that they generated "two different types of memories: events and amalgams. The event memories . . . are linked to a specific point in time and a specific event. The amalgams . . . represented repeated experiences and though each specific experience is not recalled, we know the memory represents a collection of experiences or an amalgam of repeated events in our lives. [Amalgams] may provide a narrative context around a specific memory. In this manner, amalgams are sediments or social constructions assembled from many memories" (ibid:34-5).

When they started working with the texts they followed the guidelines of the Australian collective. They read out the memory-scenes aloud, asked questions of the text, clarified details that remained unclear in the stories, added context if required. In their book they describe how initially their own internalized traditional understanding of science stood in the way of progressing beyond rather meaningless analyses. They started to do content analysis, trying to categorize the texts according to a scheme they had developed, but they found this quite unsatisfying. Eventually they found that "a common seduction is to try to categorize the content of the memories. We believe that understanding the interrelationship among the themes addresses our research concerns better than merely categorizing the content of the memory" (Kaufman et al. 1995:7).

This experience points to a problem in the text-analytical work. Progressing from one to the next text there needs to also be a recursive return to be able to monitor and realize gradual shifts of presuppositions and guiding question(s) that stood at the beginning of a project. If that gets forgotten one can easily end up where different self-organized groups within the women's movement in Germany in the 1980s got stuck when they started with memory-work. "[H]ow well or how bad that worked for them I can't really say, but we received relatively often requests, where they invited us after nine months and said, now we have an awful lot of paper and an awful lot of analyses, what are we to do with it? What was missing there was the entire framework, the basis. They did not know what to do with it" (Frauke Schwarting, Interview 25. 9. 2011).

The collective in Oklahoma found the lackluster conclusions to which their content analysis had led frustrating. In "Haug's terms we were largely oblivious to the social structures that shape our lives" (Kaufman et al. 2003:36). When they realized that their approach did not offer a route into a

deeper understanding of processes of (their own) societalization they implemented a kind of reflexive loop. "We went back to the proverbial drawing board and asked ourselves: What are we studying?" As a way out of their dilemma they decided to look at their memories with a developmental perspective (ibid:36-7). This however brought them into a conflict with the propositions in the literature on Collective Memory-Work where biography (or autobiography) is explicitly avoided.

They turned this contradiction into a productive solution by extending the method and including the developmental perspective that impressed itself from within their material, the memory-scenes. This "led us to reflect on the 'manufacture' of development as opposed to a 'natural' course of development" (ibid:37) that is often prevalent in developmental psychology. They detected processes of such manufacturing of development in the series of texts produced by each of the authors, a connection that at the same time is still in need of explanation. Such a methodological adaptation adheres firmly to the primacy of the subject matter for leading the analysis rather than enforcing an unsuitable scheme onto the material.

The example of Judith Kaufman and her group proves the suitability also of Collective Memory-Work for a situated adjustment of the method according to the aims of the collective. In this context it is worth mentioning the time factor again. With their project they stepped out of the race for hastily produced publications. Albeit that all members of the group worked in academic jobs they consciously made decisions to go against the grain of conventional academic practices. "I had experiences that this collective helped me navigate. One of them was when I was told by my department chair that I should not do research on women in leadership, that was the death knell for my academic success. I also wrote a paper [presented at annual conference of the American Educational Research Association] based upon the horror stories that women had told me about how they were treated within the academy. I got a standing ovation for the presentation, but no-one would publish the paper because I had not systematically collected and analyzed the data within a theoretical framework. I think it was important for the lot of us, but for me it was really important to have a group of people saying, wait a second, our memories, our understandings, the stories that we've been told, the stories that we can tell are important. They contain important information about how we are socialized and the impact of that socialization" (Adrienne Hyle, in Hyle et al 2020:351). "We were willing to take intellectual risks, cross disciplinary

boundaries and challenge our belief systems. We were also willing to eschew the immediate payoffs of publication, presentations and grants" (Kaufman et al. 2003:2).

They instead started a process that in advance could not be clearly determined in terms of duration and intensity. The eventual publication of their book had an impact on their status as women in science. "Nobody ever told me I could not do stuff after this group" (Adrienne Hyle, in Hyle et al: 2020:353). Such a result may be seen as an external effect of the project. Such effects are not intended initially, but they complement the learning results for the participants, and in essence they are linked to each other. It is easy to see that a newly found self-assured stance as a result of Collective Memory-Work, and also a consciousness of no longer been trapped in isolation, will always boost these external effects. Looking back on their project Diane Montgomery states: "To say our experience was educational is meek. It was a profound, life-changing learning experience those seven years" (in Hyle et al. 2020:351).

The topical results of their project are presented in five chapters in the publication from 2003. They highlight the importance of sensory perception for the development of scientific concepts. But they also point out that sensory perception is bound to social circumstances. Accordingly our connection to nature is always both socially determined and mediated by embodied experience. "Embodiment, in the sense of the body as a site for making meaning, necessarily entails the social interactions that inform perceptual experiences" (Kaufman et al. 2003:46). On this basis they develop the concept of *personal science* as depicting the individually specific acquisition of knowledge linked to personal, yet socially anchored embodied experiences.

They further attend to the integral role of metaphors in our lives, and their influence on the relationship to nature that becomes engrained in gender specific ways. "Cultural expectations for the relationship of girls and women to nature also color metaphors that touch on the elements, their everyday meanings and uses. Stereotypically, girls are not supposed to 'get dirty'; 'earthy' has both negative and positive implications. Girls may be told that they are 'out of their depth,' a metaphor implying that they would not be at ease, or perhaps safe, in particular waters or intellectual discussions" (ibid:81). Such use of metaphor has a discouraging and obstructing effect on the development of experimental and creative approaches towards nature: a blueprint for a distanced relationship to nature and to embodied

experience. For the women in the group "memory-work created a new understanding of our relation to nature. [It] enabled us to see that creativity in our play as children reinforced close connections with nature. Those connections, particularly with non-human nature, had been obscured and in several instances lost in our socialization . . . We identified and reclaimed the creative impulses evident in our memories, and this approach opened our awareness that new meaning in nature can emerge through play" (ibid:85).

In light of the gradual shift in the direction of their investigation towards the development of a relationship to nature in a process of societalization, it is no surprise that they devoted a specific chapter to the issue of power. They realized that power appeared in memories from early childhood up to early adulthood but the quality of this power changed. "We moved away from our power as young girls and our personal science . . . as something we could control, although sometimes it was only within the limits that adults structured for us. As young girls we had power to construct a personal science the we 'owned.' As we grew older we lost some of our power in nature and forgot our personal science. We were taught in school a science that was almost exclusively structured by others; we were apprenticed and became skilled in the methods of this science, the tools of our culture. In some ways, though, traditional science is no longer our science. We have begun to acknowledge the interrelationships of power and apprenticeship. We are more keenly aware of both our power and the influence of the tools of our culture, particularly as we think about our professional lives" (ibid:130).

Acknowledging the relevance of personal science has profound consequences for the group members in their praxis as researchers and university teachers. It leads straight to the primacy of the unity of subject and object in science. Recognizing the body of the researcher as part of the research figuration opens up a new perspective on the phenomena under observation, and eventually a chance for creating knowledge that "reunites intellect with feeling" (ibid:138). Consequently the group concludes, "[o]ur work then is open to an entirely new set of critical questions regarding the narratives participants provide and the sense that we make of those stories and of our observations." And in relation to teacher education as a professional field in which they were working: "We can ask: What are the other stories these educators could tell about their practice and their growth? How do they become aware that there are other possible stories to



tell? How does the researcher move beyond simply questioning the existing narrative to seriously considering other possible narratives?" (ibid:139).

In retrospective Judith Kaufman speaks of the character of Collective Memory-Work as an emancipatory learning project, and she finds that what stayed with her even more than an idea of emancipation was the concept of interruption. "I've learned the habit of scrutinizing and interrupting what I take for granted. I have always questioned assumptions but I think Memory-Work just gave me the empirical experience of what happens when you do that. It's more than a process of reflecting and being critical. It is getting into the habit of interruption" (in Hyle et al. 2020:, 351-2).

### **3.2 MEN'S STORIES FOR A CHANGE ...**

In a quiet café early afternoon.

Maggie: As I said on the phone, I read some stuff on Collective Memory-Work now and I'm getting more and more curious. At some stage I would want to try it out myself. Maybe you have a few tips for further reading?

Paul: There is a list of sources in English and German. Is there anything that would be of specific interest to you?

Maggie: The question of women and men is fascinating. I have a friend who calls herself a feminist. She says in her circles in the past they often said: Men cannot memory work. But in the train you spoke about this teacher with the inspector story, that was a man writing it. And you say that you have participated in such groups.

Paul: Men cannot memory work, I know the phrase. It can come up in conversations with women who work with the method, sometimes as a joke, sometimes a bit more serious.

Maggie: I can understand if you say, certain topics are impossible with men. But why should men not generally be able to memory work?

Paul: The phrase has a history, and in that short version it is always incomplete. The women who developed Collective Memory-Work made the experience that it was difficult to bring men to share personal memories. in Judith Kaufman's group they also spoke of the male

dominant university and how they had to fight for space and acceptance for their approach in this environment.

Maggie: But somehow somewhere men must be able to come to Collective Memory-Work, otherwise I couldn't talk with you about it and the inspector-story would have never been written.

Paul: There are differences in appropriating the method. Take CCCS in Birmingham. There were people in the late 70s and early 80s who had studied popular memory, looking at history from below and counter-narratives to the hegemonic discourse. From the exchange with *Frauenformen* a group emerged in which they experimented with Collective Memory-Work. There were four men and four women in this group. In Australia Bob Pease has worked with groups of men on topics of male socialization. In New Zealand Alan Ovens used the method in regular seminars in teacher training. In Sweden Karin Hansson led a project with artists, male and female. And Doris Allhutter in Austria has worked with groups of mainly male software developers.<sup>11</sup> I could go on for a while.

Maggie: Sure, why should men qua nature not be able to do Collective Memory-Work?

Paul: Qua nature there is nothing to stop them. But it does require an overcoming of traditional patterns of male socialization. Let me come back to CCCS. One of those who was in the group in the 1980s is Richard Johnson. Later he was also in another group of men only who worked over 13 years on issues of aging.

Maggie: Is there anything published on it?

Paul: A book, a few essays<sup>12</sup>, I'll send you the titles. But you may like to hear that I visited the group.

Maggie: Come on, did you?

Paul: I had read their book and found it fascinating. First obviously because of the group composition being all male and because 13 years is quite a long time. But then also because I had a lot of questions how exactly they worked together, and how they adapted the writing and analysis of the memories.

Maggie: If you meet for 13 years every week, or even if only fortnightly, that is a bit like a second home, isn't it?

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11 Pease (2000), Ovens & Tinning (2009), Allhutter (2012), Hansson (2020)

12 Barber et al. (2016), Blake et al. (2016, 2018)

Paul: If you meet weekly, yes. But that is not what they did. They lived in different areas. For some it was a considerable journey to come to meetings. They met every six months for a full day, three hours in the morning, a lunch break and three hours in the afternoon. Their meetings took place in a community center. They brought with them home-made food and organized the day as a pleasant event. Some of them worked in universities.

Maggie: How many were in this group?

Paul: There was a core group of five to seven who were in it from start to end. Others came and left, in total there were thirteen men involved over time. But let me pick up on the university briefly. They did not want to be in similar structures on a Saturday again. Instead they looked at it as a space for a lived alternative. In talking with them that was highlighted as a very important issue.

Maggie: But for socializing you don't need Collective Memory-Work. John would probably say all it needs is barbecue and beer.

Paul: Of course you don't need Collective Memory-Work to meet a couple of friends. But for these men there was more in it. They had shared questions about their own societalization as men in a patriarchal society. For them changes in gender specific roles, distribution of labor, hierarchies, had to be part of changes towards a more just society.

Maggie: And how did they do Collective Memory-Work then?

Paul: Their topic was aging men, or aging as a man. When they started the youngest was 43, the oldest 62. During this period in life, and increasingly so when you get older, the body calls for attention in your consciousness in forms that you didn't experience earlier on.

Maggie: I can imagine, vaginal dryness and erectile dysfunction, they meet well. Men have a menopause, too.

Paul: The group in England did in fact look at sexual experiences, among other things. For each meeting they chose a different writing trigger, usually in the morning when they met. Topics were things like aging, hair, peeing, sport, power, love, violence, work, sexuality, food, sisters, more I don't remember at the moment. They had more than twenty themes.

Maggie: What a mix, that must have brought up all sorts of peculiar stuff.

Paul: In their book they present nearly all of their stories. What is different to the stories of *Frauenformen* or those in Judith Kaufman's group is that

their texts are often not only about one scene. Sometimes they contain a collection of reflections, sometimes biographical accounts in a series of events.

Maggie: Did they consciously choose to use a different concept for writing?

Paul: No, they simply worked on basis of their earlier experiences in writing workshops. After an initial discussion in which they agreed on the trigger they went to different spots in the venue and each of them wrote for 45 to 60 minutes. The idea was that the spontaneous writing would generate less censored texts.

Maggie: Does that not contradict the ideas of which you spoke in the train, deconstructing the artful constructions that we craft into our stories?

Paul: This group approached the texts differently. They may share a common wish for a more just society. But they come from differing traditions of thought. Some are Marxists, others come from psychoanalysis, others again have a more spiritual background. There can be tension sometimes. If they were to enter into a detailed deconstruction of a particular text this could easily lead to conflictual debates. Instead they agree to see the different approaches but then also to leave it at that for the time being.

Maggie: Sounds a bit like an avoidance strategy. What can you learn from it if you don't enter into the critical questioning of your self-constructions?

Paul: Avoidance strategy is a good way to put it. They also thought about it. It is a conscious avoidance of possible conflicts within the group. The purpose is to keep the group together. All of these men are actively involved in other groups where they meet more often and discuss topics more controversially. They weigh up risks and benefits of starting an internal controversy over the interpretation of a particular memory story. And if there is doubt, they choose to prioritize group cohesion over controversy.

Maggie: But they only meet twice a year.

Paul: Correct. If these meetings were parcels they would be labeled *fragile: handle with care*. When I spoke with them there were some who expressed a slight frustration about the lack of depth in the text-analysis. But every single one of them said this was more than compensated for by the group's coherence. In practical terms, prior to their lunch break they came together again to read out their texts, not yet discuss them. In the afternoon the texts then were read out again. After each reading of a text the group would raise questions and give comments, without following a

certain fixed scheme of questions. After 20 to 30 minutes they moved on to the next text, and so on.

Maggie: Even in this manner they will most likely detect reoccurring themes or white spots in the stories. But if I get you right, they did not discuss their meaning?

Paul: Not in a way that would have been possible given their experience, knowledge and training in critical questioning and with controversial debates.

Maggie: I guess that in itself is an important learning experience for men. It is a perspective that values relationships and counters dogmatism and alpha-mentality.

Paul: That is what they say. And they independently of each other stated how important it was that there were no hierarchies in their group.

Maggie: And what did they find out over 13 years?

Paul: If you read the book you may at first sight be disappointed. There we have a group of pro-feminist men who potter around for 13 years and at the end of the day come to the conclusion not to publish detailed results of their work because their different backgrounds prevent them from reaching consensus on such results. But if you are willing to risk a second look you will see that the process itself is a result, a demonstration of an alternative to individualization and atomization. It breaks up structures of competition. Being open to critical listening yet showing solidarity, accepting the personal as socially bound and politically relevant, the shared organization and sustaining of a space free of hierarchies, being available to others as a catalyst for their reflection processes. Doesn't sound too bad for starters, or not?

Maggie: But is all of this still Collective Memory-Work?

Paul: Is it important what it is called?

Maggie: I guess for understanding each other, yes. For putting a label on it, no. What I see more and more is that Collective Memory-Work is not a strict set of procedures. Could we say that is like family of methods?<sup>13</sup>

Paul: Interesting thought. Maybe we come back to it when we meet again?

Maggie: Sure, and next time we may have John with us again.

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13 See, e.g. McLeod & Thomson (2009:28), Cushing-Leubner (2017:281).

### 3.3 THE HAYWARD COLLECTIVE

Erin Stutelberg, Angela Coffee, Colleen Clemens and Erin Dyke met during their postgraduate studies in education at the University of Minnesota. They shared interests in alternatives to traditional school practices, feminist pedagogy and feminist research methods. Timothy Lensmire, a lecturer in the College of Education, suggested they should initiate a self-organized seminar to study literature specifically related to their field of interest. "He handed us some stacks of books, and included was *Female Sexualization*. We read lots of different feminist authors in that course together, but we kept cycling back to Collective Memory-Work as a way to move ourselves forward together in exploring our own big questions about ourselves" (Erin Stutelberg, personal communication November 18, 2018).

These questions concerned issues like the self-images of teachers in US-schools, the role of schools in the perpetuation of racist social structure and possibilities for teachers to counteract this, the specific situation of women in teaching, but also experiences of women within academia. Furthermore they also shared a curiosity about embodied experiences of teachers' controlling and controlled bodies in classrooms, corridors, school yards. This also incited the hope to make embodied experiences and spontaneous insights a source of knowledge. They deemed Collective Memory-Work a suitable entry route for all of this.

Based on their reading of *Female Sexualization* they developed a one-hour workshop in which participants were to write and discuss short memory-scenes. When experimenting with the workshop they were not satisfied with the format. They realized that it was simply impossible to tap into the potential of the method in such a way. Therefore they started a search for others in their faculty to join them for another self-organized seminar in which a practical application of Collective Memory-Work was to be the central element. "The word started to spread about what we were doing. And other folks became interested, particularly people who identify as queer who were looking for spaces in the academy where they could bring their full identities and their full selves to those spaces. Because they were experiencing other kinds of discrimination or marginalization because of their queerness. And then also some students of color, and a faculty member of color who is an indigenous women who also became interested. Her name is Mary Hermes" (ibid.).

"I was wondering if I could sponsor a course in which I didn't have really expertise. So, here is one thing I think that gets us out of our silos. These women already had a reading group one semester, had strong relationships to another. Two women in the cohort got married, eventually. And they said, 'You know, we are so interested in collectively writing and analyzing stories because there is no space in the university as graduate students to work together. We want to read Frigga Haug, and we want to do the Collective Memory-Work, and would you facilitate that?' And I said, 'Sure.' They brought all of the content, they brought lots of reading, lots of conversations they already had. When we started to meet, officially, we said, 'OK., we're gonna write the syllabus together, we're gonna work to contradict all the things that keep us apart from functioning as whole human beings in bodies'" (Mary Hermes, personal communication January 31, 2019).

Together with Keitha-Gail Martin-Kerr, Jenny Cushing-Leubner and Shannon Dahmes they developed a plan for a seminar over a semester on feminist and queer methods in educational research with a central focus on practically experimenting with Collective Memory-Work.

Besides meeting regularly in the university the participants also went on a retreat in Hayward, Minnesota (hence the name Hayward Collective). Their discussions brought them to focus on the topic of belonging to and within academia. In their appropriation of the method the group took a research guide that Frigga Haug had published in English (1999b) as their starting point. They wrote memory-scenes on the trigger sentence: "What life experience feels incredibly relevant to your academic experience and yet excluded, dangerous, or impossible in academic spaces" (Stutelberg 2016: 7). In their approach to the analysis of the texts they asked similar questions as mentioned by Paul in the first chapter (subjects, verbs, emotions, motivations, clichés, white spots, contradictions, use of language).

According to their interest in the relevance of embodied sensuous-vital experiences for processes of learning and knowledge generation they consciously looked at the physical spaces for their own work. Rather than meeting in a concrete-clad classroom they instead booked a seminar room that offered an enjoyable atmosphere, or they met in the house of a group member. In the group "[t]here was a yoga teacher, someone who did meditation. I often brought in games and movement. One time we made birch-bark earrings which comes from my culture, but to be making something as we're talking. We really tried to contradict a lot of the practices that we felt were keeping us very narrow, both literally, physically

and intellectually" (Mary Hermes, personal communication January 31, 2019). In their weekend retreats they also tried to keep a good balance between high-concentration intellectual work phases and physical relaxation (yoga, skiing, walking).

The intensity of the discussions that were possible in this set-up stretched well beyond what is otherwise the norm in university courses, with corresponding consequences. Mary Hermes remembers that some of the supervisors of the students came back to her saying, "that class you facilitated was life changing for many of them" (ibid.).

The motif of life changing experiences came up already in Diane Montgomery's retrospective comments on their project in Oklahoma. Not everybody may like this choice of words, but even if you don't, at the end of the day what remains is that for participants in the Hayward Collective their project offered extremely long-lasting and formative learning experiences. This is reflected in comments by group members. "My ensuing experiences with CMW, in sharing and examining individual memories as important texts that helped everyone in our group get smarter and understand our own experiences differently, radically shifted the way I think about stories, research, and relationships in learning" (Coffee 2016:214). "[I]t was one of the first times I felt like I was doing kind of narrative, more creative writing in the university. I felt really nice and it was really impactful. And it also felt like a very serious space. Something that I gained is definitely community, of doing, of thinking, and then also a shift in ways of thinking about research as inherently collective and of being more intentional about creating more horizontal research relationships" (Erin Dyke, personal communication October 15, 2018).

After the self-organized seminar five of the core group adapted Collective Memory-Work in their dissertation projects. A brief recount: Closest to the model presented by *Frauenformen* remained Erin Stutelberg. She worked with eight female teachers who wrote memory-scenes about "a time when you felt your teacher body being perceived in a very particular way (by students, parents, administrators, colleagues, or yourself)" (Stutelberg, 2016, 286). The results of their project provided the basis for her thesis about embodied experiences of teachers in secondary schools.

Keitha-Gail Martin-Kerr used memory-scenes by four women in a study of women in Jamaica who love women. During the analysis of the texts she worked together with a friend, but not with all authors of the memory-scenes. She also included in the data for her dissertation semi-structured



interviews, Jamaican dance hall songs and a post-reflexive journal kept during the process of data collection (Martin-Kerr 2016:48).

In two other projects Erin Dyke and Jenna Cushing-Leubner transferred the work with self-generated memory-scenes into a dialogic process between two persons. Jenna Cushing-Leubner builds her dissertation on the experiences emerging from a school-research-liaison in which she supervised (and advised) a teacher who delivered an experimental heritage language course in a secondary school. During their collaboration they regularly exchanged and analyzed memory-stories triggered by their latest topical questions. She speaks of "paired collective memory work" to characterize their adaptation of the method (Cushing-Leubner 2017:104).

Erin Dyke's dissertation (2016) was similarly a result of a collaboration with one partner during the research project. She focused on the developments and transformations in a personal friendship when this friend enrolled as student in a course that Erin taught. They also used memory-scenes and joint analysis as basis for further discussion.

Angela Coffee used self-generated memory-scenes that had been written during the work with the Hayward Collective as material for a critical auto-ethnography. Her guiding question was "What dangerous histories live in and through my schooled body?" (Coffee 2016:16).

All these projects took place in the context of postgraduate studies. Not least the successful and impactful implementation of their self-organized seminars gave these women a reassurance in approaching methods of research and learning in a manner that opened up possibilities for creative adaptations of Collective Memory-Work. However, in contrast to the group around Judith Kaufman in Oklahoma at the beginning of the 1990s they did not have to fight for recognition of their approaches as scientifically valid. Instead they found open minded lecturers who were prepared to support them in their theoretical and practical experiments. The value of such support is immense. The story of the Hayward Collective is a good example for progressive praxis on the side of lecturers in the best interest of students.

A further outcome, albeit not a planned one, of the Hayward Collective's efforts is the establishment of a course on feminist and queer research methods that is offered by Mary Hermes since then. In relation to the potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning it is also worthwhile to have a brief look at the effects on the lecturer. Her initial doubts about facilitating the course were mentioned already.

Retrospectively she also speaks of further doubtful elements. She was uncertain whether it was appropriate to have students deciding themselves about all aspects of the course, structure, content, assessment. The actual process eventually convinced her that it was.

Experiences in following years with other groups who joined the seminars as an already existing course within the faculties program open a perspective on a group's establishment and composition as a decisive factor. Mary Hermes reports varying observations. If participants enrol by picking from a list in the course syllabus without a genuine topical interest, this can lead to conflictual interpersonal dynamics within such a group, with negative consequences on the envisaged collective work in this specific setting. For learning processes which rely on an intense identification and attachment with the topics in question and which require a strong group coherence it can be helpful to aim for a more homogeneous group composition (Mary Hermes, personal communication January 31, 2019).

At the end of this section a brief remark may be added on the specific interest within the Hayward Collective concerning questions of embodiment and knowledge generation. Three of the group members experimented separately with elements of role play as an enhancement of Collective Memory-Work. Colleen Clements had a drama and theater background. In a small group together with Erin Stutelberg and Angela Coffee they acted out a number of memory-scenes, with interchanging roles. They found this fruitful for perceiving non-verbal elements in the situations that triggered the memory-scenes. "It helped us to have more knowledge about the ways that our bodies are both present in every moment of our lives, but that we sometimes tend to shut them off, or have a tendency to ignore what they're telling us, or what knowledge or memory may already be there" (Colleen Clements, personal communication December 14, 2018).

### **3.4 BODY AND MIND**

The idea to use experiences as basis for gaining knowledge is conceptually inscribed to Collective Memory-Work. Experiences are impossible without a material praxis. Even a supposedly pure thinking is bound to the material existence of a thinking subject. The thinking brain sits in a head that sits on a neck that sits on a body that far too often sits on a chair in a particular

room. All the sitting is praxis, materially lived existence. Only on this basis is thinking actually possible. The room, the chair, the duration of the sitting, the physical condition of the thinking subject are all together part of the *experience of thinking*. In search for routes into gaining knowledge about (our own) processes of societalization it is necessary to understand the separation of body and mind as a fiction. It is no accident that specifically people working in the traditionally head-heavy academic sector develop a strong interest to overcome this separation.

Not only women in the Hayward Collective resorted to role play in their attempt to bring bodies in a more pronounced position in their adaptation of the method. A group in Halifax (Canada) provides another example. It was made up of seven female researchers and lecturers in different faculties (women's and gender studies, cultural studies, music, sociology, education). Four of the women (Susanne Gannon, Michele Byers, Mythili Rahiva, Susan Walsh) wrote an essay in which they describe their methodical adaptations (2014). In their project the collective met for a week long workshop on "Sexuality and School" in the context of researching gender specific patterns in socialization processes in girlhood studies.

The group followed the model of Collective Biography, an adaptation of Collective Memory-Work that was developed by Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon (2006). The procedures suggested in this approach are in many regards similar to practices in other adaptations. Participants produce texts based on personal (remembered) experiences. These texts function as basis and anchor in an engagement with theories about the respective topic. Depending on how much time a group has at hand and what their local interests are it is possible to concentrate stronger on individual texts or on a more comparative reading of the stories. In many cases there is a stronger emphasis on the collective production of the memory-scenes, i.e. prior to writing them a process is included of oral story-telling, empathic listening and feedback to the narrators who then craft their stories accordingly. However, the most important distinction in Collective Biography is not so much found in methodical procedures as it is a different theoretical positioning and background that accounts for a different framework in which texts are interpreted.<sup>14</sup>

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14 Such positions do not have to be static. Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon refer to further diverse influences on their thinking over the years, including works of, e.g. Gilles Deleuze or Karen Barad (see also: Davies & Gannon, forthcoming)

The original development of Collective Memory-Work explicitly aimed at increasing capacities for action in the sense of emancipatory learning for liberating interventions, and it was closely connected to the attempt to bring together Marxism and Feminism. Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon's starting point is different. "Our approach has not been embedded in this kind of quarrel with Marxism. Our theoretical framework is post-structuralist, and we take this not to be a dogmatic framework that is in need of quarreling with" (Davies and Gannon 2006:4). The essential difference therefore arises at the end of the process when working with memories. It concerns a different interpretive framework and a departure from the points of reference in historical-materialist debate in favor of a stronger orientation towards effects of discourses. "With the methodological naming of our work as 'collective biography' . . . we signal a shift to the collective interpretation of memory within an explicitly post-structuralist framework with its attendant emphasis on deconstructing normative notions of power and knowledge, on the processes of subjectification<sup>15</sup>, and on the constitutive effects of discourse" (Gannon et al. 2014:62).

Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon pointed out that their "primary interest lies in developing the process of collective biography as a means of learning to read/write embodied social selves" (Davies and Gannon 2006: 7). The critique of the separation of body and mind is implicit from the outset.

This orientation also led the women in the workshop on "Sexuality and School." Following the last section and the idea of using role play as an enhancement of Collective Memory-Work, what is of particular interest is the integration of elements of Augusto Boal's image theater in the workshop in Halifax. This is a form of "Theater of the Oppressed" in which participants form a sculpture consisting of the bodies of other participants. These

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15 Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon understood subjectification to mean the historically and culturally specific processes through which one is subjected to discursive regimes and regulatory frameworks through which gendered individuals and their social contexts are also, and through the same processes, constituted (2021, forthcoming).

Otherwise subjectification "can be understood as the process by which individuals work themselves into social structures they themselves do not consciously determine, but to which they subordinate themselves. The concept allows for the active participation of individuals in heteronomy." (Haug et al. 1987:59) Subjectification can be seen as a specific form of societalization.

sculptures are like frozen pictures, tableaux capturing a specific moment, here: of a memory scene. They are meant as a starting point for critical reflection to gain a better understanding of the original situation and its underlying structures and dynamics. The group in Halifax was supported in this part of their project by Susan Spence-Campbell, a trained drama facilitator. In their use of image theater they also progressed to a second stage where the persons in the sculpture started acting from the position they were put in. At this point the frozen image comes to life and a new situation evolves.

In their report on the workshop this process is explained by an example of a scene that was used for such an exercise. The author of the scene had written about a school memory in which she together with others had watched a girl (Sherry) "doing rollovers and the splits upside down on the monkey bars." The author remembers "watching and waiting with the other girls, pointing and laughing, flushing with guilty pleasure when Sherry does the splits and everyone can see her vagina" (Gannon et al. 2014:66).

For the image theater Susan Spence-Campbell chose a text fragment that one of the participants (as director) had to form into a frozen image (by way of putting the other participants in a fixed position within the sculpture). This procedure was repeated for the different memory-scenes in the group. The facilitator "chose the fragments from the texts . . . based on their possibilities for tableau, not because of a personal investment in the group dynamics, the writing process, or the texts themselves" (ibid:70). The task of being the director was always given to a different participant, but not to the author of the scene. A welcome effect of this practice is that ownership of the text shifts from the author to the group, hence the problematic that is dealt with in the text is generalized. This effect is already envisaged in the text-analysis. Here it is re-actualized and further supported by the physical enactment.

In their work with the above mentioned scene (Sherry) the group also introduced a new character who did not feature in the written text originally. They integrated a teacher in the situation who looked at the unfolding scene from another perspective. In bringing in this new character the group filled a white spot that they had discovered in their earlier discussion.

Further new perspectives were opened up by using snapshots, pictures taken of the sculpture by Susan Spence-Campbell from different positions in the room. "As they could be immediately displayed on a computer screen,

the photographs were starting points for discussions during which we offered varying and multiple interpretations of the characters we had just 'played,' considering their motivations, feelings, next actions and so on. In the Sherry tableau, we were struck by the expression on Sherry's face in the photo: How did she experience this event? As a moment of freedom and joy, oblivious to the onlookers? As defiance? As a means of getting attention? What was the teacher thinking? Would she ask Sherry to get down from the monkey bars? Discipline the group of girls? Was she deriving her own secret pleasure? And what was going on with the two groups of girls, the onlookers, individually and collectively? What affects were created through their 'onlooking?'" (ibid:71).

From the perspective of actors being involved as well as from the perspective of looking at the pictures thereof, the group derived the basis for the next step, i.e. bringing the sculpture to life, starting to move, talk, act. In their retrospective account they share the pleasure and lasting impressions that this exercise provided for them: "we were struck by the gusto with which we threw ourselves into the roles, and the ways in which we imagined our bodies physically into particular shapes, forms, and relations with others . . . . In this space of multiple mo(ve)ments we experienced our bodies, not as fixed biographical entities located in time and space, but as fluid, time-traveling nomadic becomings, both acting upon, and being acted upon, by stories generated within the group" (ibid:72).

The physically felt intensity of group work in this form has effects which should also be regarded as learning experiences. The group in Halifax speaks of an energy that was "vibrant, something less attached to the discursive and the conceptual—and something that exceeded any of our individual 'selves'" (ibid:69).

Descriptions using such language can leave a peculiar aftertaste. As giving witness of the potential of Collective Memory-Work they are obviously quite well suited to point to possible enhancements. On the other hand they can also trigger questions about the lived reality in academic professions and the lack of experiences of immediate physicality therein. In any case, it has to be credited to the feminist interventions that in academia there is a growing interest in overcoming the separation of body and mind.

Experiencing immediate physicality however is not yet the same as comprehending insight. This still requires reflection, meaning making and integrating the experience(s) into a theoretical framework. The introduction

of modes of working with bodies in Collective Memory-Work provides a broader range of possible access routes. It is commonplace knowledge that different people prefer different information channels, some more visual, others more aural or haptic. For those who are deterred by the text-heaviness of Collective Memory-Work (in written and spoken words), the introduction of physical activities offers a chance to find their own way into working in and with a group. But even where role play is used as another format, at the end of the day an intellectual engagement with the (self-)constructions in the memory-scenes is still required. The two approaches complement each other, they are not interchangeable, neither should they be played off against each other.

An attempt to extend Collective Memory-Work beyond dealing with text only was also made by a group in England. Carla Willig, Val Gillies, Angela Harden, Katherine Johnson, Paula Reavey and Vicky Strange worked together for six years in a project on embodied experiences. Initially they wrote memory-scenes in line with the suggestions in the 1992 book on *Emotion and Gender* (Crawford et al.). Their trigger words were "sweating" and "pain" (Gillies et al. 2004). Following the writing of the scenes they discussed and analyzed them. But they found that, "[a]lthough we consider memory work to be an extremely useful way in which to elicit embodied experience, our research did raise questions about solely relying on verbal/written accounts to elicit 'embodied material.' We found, for example, that the language we used to convey our embodied experiences was inevitably distilled from culturally ingrained, dualistic discourses. Furthermore, our discussions of memory work and the still central role of language in expressing embodiment led us to consider using means of expression that could capture aspects of experience not directly accessible or constrained by conventional structures of reasoning (such as verbal language)" (Gillies et al. 2005:200).

Accordingly in a further round of engaging with memories they reverted to painting pictures instead of writing a memory-scene. These pictures were triggered by the term "aging."

In their essay on this part of the project they avoid using the term Collective Memory-Work as a label for their method. They present their practices as a derivation thereof. In the context of considerations of enhancements of the method—and particularly in relation to overcoming separations of body/mind—the group's efforts are worth looking at.

It is easy to understand that a problem in a joint analysis of images arises when it comes to exchanging opinions or interpretations among the group members. Obviously this is not possible without reverting back to language. Carla Willig remembers that "it was quite frustrating. We had quite a lot of discussions on the sense of being stuck by language. In a way we had this idea that once we paint something or draw something we will have the meaning sort of coming from that. And of course, we realized that doesn't come. We still found at the end it comes back to language. I didn't feel in the end that having an image that was painted by somebody gets you to [connect] that necessarily to the internal experience" (personal communication December 6, 2018).

Therefore she thinks that the images are not a bridge directly into experience. The search at the time in the group for such a bridge was certainly rooted in the theoretical background of the participants who all came from the field of psychology. "[W]hen I was doing the memory-work I was still looking for some recipe that would allow [to] plug-in to the experience. Like plug-in to the computer, downloading what is inside onto an external hard drive. But now I accept that the best we can do is to circle around, look at things, maybe think, but you will not be able to put your finger on it directly" (ibid.).

Applications as this one confirm the importance of the background of participants for their respective search for (new) insights, knowledge, comprehension. It is advisable for every group to define their problematic in the early stages of their project and to monitor well shifts and transfers of interests that can happen during the joint work process. In general Collective Memory-Work can be used for any topic that is related to aspects of societalization, the "process by which individuals work themselves into social structures they themselves do not consciously determine, but to which they subordinate themselves" (Haug et al. 1987:59). Finding the "true" experience that lies behind a memory-scene is not possible with Collective Memory-Work.



## 4 HOW TO: TEXT-ANALYSIS

The central role of analytically engaging with language in Collective Memory-Work has been pointed out a couple of times. How then to do that: text-analysis? The easiest way to show it is to use an example. It is important however, to keep in mind that the type of text-analysis that is documented in this chapter is but *one* way to do it. Every group that uses Collective Memory-Work over a longer period of time will find their own ways to adapt the different stages of the work process to their own needs and wants, including adaptations of text-analysis. This is a crucial aspect of appropriating (not only) Collective Memory-Work.

### 4.1 A TEMPLATE

Here I am going to present an example in which a template is used that is essentially based on the systematization of procedures in the *Frauenformen* projects (Haug et al. 1987, Haug 1999a, 2008). Whoever uses this template can be sure that a detailed and intense analytic engagement with the memory-scenes is possible. Therefore it is a good entry route into this kind of work.

First I will present the blank template (with a few explanatory comments). Then the context in which the sample story was written is briefly explained. Eventually the sample story and the analysis that was done by the group that worked with it are presented. Working with different groups in a wide range of settings has taught me that there are a number of reoccurring "frequently asked questions" in relation to process and procedures of text-analysis. It is possible that for you as a reader some of them come up when studying the blank template and the sample story. If that is the case I would ask you to take note of them but delay trying to get an immediate answer. In the next chapter Maggie, Paul, John (and Tina) will pick up the strings that are probably left loose.

## Example template

### Text-analysis: Adaptation based on Frigga Haug's model<sup>16</sup>

#### **Watch out I**

*This is not about an analysis of the personality of the author, neither is it about finding out the "true story".*

#### **Watch out II**

*If the author is part of the group that analyses a text s/he will probably feel a great temptation to "defend" her/his text, e.g., by explaining "that is not what I meant, I meant this . . ." or "no, that is not how it was, it was like this . . .".*

*However, in the analysis we are not trying to find out "how it really was", neither is our interest to hear what the author "really meant".*

*We are looking for constructions of characters and constructions of meaning in the context of (and referring back to) our topical discussion.*

#### Procedure

The text is read out by the author or another group member. At this stage it is helpful if the listeners do not look at the print-out of the story.

We listen and let the text sink in.

### **Step 1 Empathic Understanding**

*If the author is part of the group s/he is silently listening during this phase (see above Watch out II).*

*To allow the author a positioning as "silent witness" of the discussion the other participants are not referring to the author by name when talking about the text. E.g. if a text is written by Jenny, and in her text she used as a pseudonym Selma for herself (as protagonist in the story), then the participants in the discussion will not refer to "Jenny" when talking about the story. They may refer to "Selma" or to "the author." Thus in such a discussion a statement about an immediate understanding or the message of the authors could be: "What I see Selma telling me here is: XYZ", or "What I understand the author tries to tell me is: XYZ".*

*In the discussion the author is also not personally addressed with any further question about the text, e.g. to explain what she meant, or what she really meant, or whether we understood what she meant as how she*

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16 <http://www.friggahaug.inkrit.de/documents/memorywork-researchguidei7.pdf>

*really, really meant it. The deliberations around what the author meant is solely among the other participants in the group.*

*We discuss first impressions and write down in short terms:*

- Context of the scene
- Message of the author (What is s/he trying to say ...)
- Common Sense Theory (proverbial, everyday knowledge)
- The Title that the group gives the story

*Then we put the results out of sight.*

**Step 2 Deconstruction (Distanced Analytic Understanding)**

*Now we work with the printed text/s. We "deconstruct" the text by identifying:*

- Subjects, Activities, Emotions, Motivations
- Linguistic Peculiarities
- Clichés
- Topic
- White Spots
- Contradictions

*For a systematic overview we use a table format to note these elements:*

Subjects	Activities (Verbs)	Emotions	Motivations
Main protagonist			
Other persons			
Other subjects			
Linguistic Peculiarities / Use of Language (e.g., use of attributes [adverbs, adjectives], sentence structures, incomplete sentences, animated subjects, rhetorical questions, repetitions etc.)			
Clichés			
Topic (How does the topic appear in the story?)			
White spots (Is something missing in the story?)			
Contradictions (Are there contradictions in the story?)			
Connections (Who/what is connected with who/what – and how?)			

*Now we also put the printed texts out of sight.*

*We continue working only with the table.*

### **Step 3 Reconstruction (Abstracting)**

*First we try to answer the question:*

- How are the characters in the story constructed?

*Then we try to formulate the:*

- Message of the story (Subtext)

*We write both of this down.*

*We may compare our results with our initial impressions from the empathic understanding.*

### **Step 4 Topical Transfer (Shifting the problem)**

*Taking the theses of Step 3 as starting point we try to*

- Refer back to our guiding question (resp. the emerging themes in successive prior text-analyses)

*Results of the discussion are written down.*

## **4.2 NEITHER HERE NOR THERE**

Memory-scenes are always written in a particular context. Analyzing a given memory-scene in a different context would lead to different results. But even before that: the memory-scene would have been written differently in a different context.

The project from which the following example is drawn was a continuing professional development course for deputy managers of community pre-schools that I facilitated (Hamm 2021). It was set up on the initiative of the professional services advisor<sup>17</sup> of the service provider. Four deputy managers took part in the project. Over the period of half a year we met seven times. Each of these meetings lasted for three hours. Two of the meetings took place in a seminar room outside of the pre-schools, for the

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17 The role of 'professional services advisor' in this case was ambiguous. It included pedagogical counselling, continuing professional development, but also a supervisory function in relation to pedagogical practices in the different pre-schools of the provider.

other five meetings we used rooms in the pre-schools that were free at the respective times.

During the first meeting the participants spoke about their everyday experiences in their jobs. A reoccurring motif was the metaphor of "betwixt and between" to describe their position in the pre-schools. They are not only educators, neither are they only managers. They are both a bit, but neither properly. Hence they came up with the term of "neither here nor there, they daily splits in the job." Following the initial group discussion I met each participant on their own for an hour-long individual conversation. In these conversations we identified in more detail the topics that they identified as most pressing in their professional practice.

In both the group discussion and the individual conversations it was clear that a lot of what seemed self-evident in the framework of professional practice in pre-schools became questionable if even slightly pressed for a rationale. The respective attempts to provide sufficient reasons often led to unsatisfactory results for the participants themselves. Instead they got tangled up in contradiction or found gaps in what they had thought to be firm knowledge. Reasons which they could recount off by heart suddenly were found not to stand up to scrutiny. Consequently also the actions based on these reasons became questionable. This resulted in a "productive uncertainty" that we turned into a shared search for greater clarity.

Topics that came up in the group discussion and the following individual conversations included, e.g. the individual dealing with structural requirements, the reasoning behind scaled salaries, concepts of authority and their effects in everyday encounters. A topic that was equally pressing for all participants was the concept of "personnel management"<sup>18</sup>. In the documentation of the group it says: "We looked again at the term 'personnel management.' It is made up of two parts: personnel and management. To be able to manage personnel it is first of all necessary to *have* personnel. This implies a division already. Whoever *has* personnel is per definition not part of the personnel. A second division is contained in the term of management. For managing there need to always be others to be managed. The deputy manager however is both manager and managed,

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18 I have translated the original (German) term *Personalführung* here as 'personnel management' rather than 'staff management' (which would not depict the undertone of formality that is included in the original), or 'human resource management' (which would not be true to the undertone of patronizing personal relationships that is included in the original).

she is both leader and led, and she is also a member of the personnel. That mirrors the experience of daily splits."

As a guiding question that provided a point of reference in the Collective Memory-Work the group formulated: "Who leads who, how and why? And where does that lead to?" For writing the memory-scenes we agreed on the trigger sentence: "A time when I gave an order."

### The sample memory-scene

#### *A time when I gave an order* **The manager**

*The morning started stressful and chaotic already. By 8 a.m. a couple of colleagues had rung in sick, other were to start only at 9 a.m. and lots of children who had been brought by their parents swarmed around the house already. Anna, the deputy manager of the pre-school knew such situations quite well. The manager had a day off, thus Anna carried the responsibility for distributing the colleagues to the rooms so that supervision was guaranteed and the children in the house would be taken care of. She had a close look at the staff-roster, thought what personnel capacity she had and how she could best put the colleagues into the different rooms that needed to be staffed. She realized that on this day the weekly small group session with the children who were going to go to school next year was scheduled. She also knew that for the two colleagues, Tamara and Anke, it was very important to be with this group always as a team of two. Today however it would not be possible, that was immediately clear to Anna. It was not proportionate for Anna to have two qualified staff members together with a group of just about 10 children while there was such a shortage of staff. She also deemed it unfair to the other colleagues who would have to look after the bulk of the other children. Anna made a decision. Today's small group can be facilitated only by one colleague. The other one has to open up a play area so that the children have the chance to spread out within the house. Anna knew, when she tells Tamara and Anke about her decision, it will create anger and this tension will draw through the entire morning . . .*

*Anna went determinedly to Anke who sat on the sofa and read a book to a couple of children.*

Anna said: "Anke, unfortunately it is not possible today for Tamara and you to be together in the small group. We are understaffed today and it is urgently necessary that one of you opens up the 'Wonderland.' Please arrange among yourselves."

Anke squinched up her face and answered obviously angry: "Yes, Tamara and myself have prepared together for the group today! We are angry if over and over it cannot be held as we have planned!"

Anna waited. Inwardly she was angry about Anke's reaction, but she said nothing. She waited.

After a while Anke continued saying: "Very well then, I will talk to Tamara and we'll have a look who of us will take care of opening the 'Wonderland.'"

Anna thanked her and went.

The work done with the text as documented in the notes from the project:

**Step 1 Empathic Understanding**

Context	Pre-School
Title	The manager
Message	Anna takes care for a fair and equal distribution of labor. She remains steadfast simply by waiting.
Common Sense Theory	Nothing gets eaten as hot as it is boiled. In calmness lies power. Oooooommmhh ... Talk is silver, silence is gold.

## Step 2 Deconstruction (Distanced Analytic Understanding)

Subjects	Activities (Verbs)	Emotions	Motivations
Anna	knew carried responsibility had a close look thought realized knew deemed made a decision knew went (determinedly) said waited was angry (inwardly) said nothing waited thanked went	anger <i>inwardly</i>	taking care of all children  fairness towards colleagues
Anke	squinted up her face answered (angry) said	angry <i>expresses</i> <i>anger</i>	
Morning	started stressful and chaotic		
Colleagues	had rung in sick were to start		
Children	swarmed around the house		
Manager	had a day off		
Linguistic Peculiarities (use of language) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reader gets a detailed reasoning for Anna's decision. Anke in the scene gets a "short version" only.</li> <li>Direct speech</li> </ul>			
Clichés <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manager absent, house full, colleagues sick, emergency program (this is a configuration that we hear so often that it</li> </ul>			



<p>becomes a cliché)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The value of small group work (team-teaching)</li> <li>• Swarming children</li> </ul>
<p>Topic (How does the topic appear in the story?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The order comes in form of a plea: "Please arrange among yourself."</li> </ul>
<p>White spots (Is something missing in the story?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The children together with Anke on the sofa?</li> <li>• There is no description of the environment (location, scenery).</li> </ul>
<p>Contradictions (Are there contradictions in the story?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anna and Anke depict the problem for the small group work differently. Anna: "today"- Anke: "over and over"</li> </ul>
<p>Connections (Who/what is connected to who/what – and how?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informing about decision → Anger</li> <li>• Sickness of colleagues → Changes in staff rota</li> <li>• Anke and Tamara are connected via the team-teaching (small group work).</li> <li>• Anna and Anke are connected via the shared task (taking care of children), but they are also separated by their position in the institutional hierarchy (Anna is responsible for the distribution of staff; Anke (and colleagues) are responsible for carrying out the concrete/physical work in the group/house).</li> </ul>

### Step 3 Reconstruction (Abstracting)

*Anna is constructed as a person who controls her emotions. She appears calm and maintains a polite form of communication (even if she is angry inwardly). She is depicted as vigilant, she has "the whole" in view. Anke is constructed as impulsive, her feelings are writ in the face. The construction of Anke and Anna present a pair of opposites. We see a parallel in it to the division of labor into "hands and heads."*

*The way how colleagues, children and the manager are worked into the construction of the text functions as basis for the clichéd scenario. This kind of narrative pulls in the reader who supposedly knows such scenarios without a need to ask questions about them.*

*Message of the story:*

*In what seems to be a critical situation Anna makes a decision. To put the decision into practice Anna relies on Anke. To bring Anke to putting the decision into practice Anna needs to control her emotions. In general terms, (sometimes) leaders have to swallow (a bit) more than the led: Those who want to lead need to be ready to suffer . . . based on the assumption that Anna cannot be (act) authentic(ally), has to control her emotions, hide her anger.*

#### **Step 4 Topical Transfer (Shifting the problem)**

*We thought about possible alternatives for action in the scenario depicted in the story. We spoke about the difference between alternative tactics and structural alternatives.*

*For instance, we could take the dialogue in the scene between Anna and Anke as starting point for a search for alternatives. The author provides the reader (listener) with a rather detailed reasoning for Anna's decision. Hence the decision is made comprehensible for the reader (listener), it is depicted as the right and possibly inevitable decision. But Anke in the scene gets only a short version of the entire process of thought that Anna went through. Hence the whole issue could be interpreted as a problem of communication that could be solved differently, e.g. by advising Anna to include in the conversation with Anke the lines of thought that brought her to the decision. We saw this as an alternative tactic because it still rests on the premise that it is Anna who decides, and the problem is depicted as one of conveying the message in a better wrapping to Anke, so as to find her approval and avoid triggering anger. As a structural alternative we discussed the idea that decision/s on the different tasks and rotas of educational staff (including temporary staff, interns, etc.) are not made by Anna (i.e. management). Instead a brief plenary of the adults in the pre-school could be held, e.g. shortly before 9 a.m., during which the situation on the given day is looked at and ad*

*hoc solutions for unforeseen problems are found and agreed collectively, including necessary/helpful/desired adjustments of rota, tasks.*

*We discussed such a scenario. In the discussion came up:*

- the fear that such a procedure would lead to nowhere . . . and at the end of the day it would still be the manager who would have to decide;*
- the observation that on days where (for whatever reason) neither manager nor deputy manager are present in the pre-school, it is obviously possible for teams to find solutions for problems that arise;*
- there are examples of teams solving problems of tasks and rota without interference of management . . . e.g. if during the afternoon groups are merged, rooms are open and the respective educators who are still present agree among themselves who does what at what time;*
- the fear that some members of staff would cherry-pick . . . and therefore the manager has a duty of care to make sure that fairness prevails;*
- the opinion that as long as the manager is part of the plenary the educators would simply expect that a decision is made by the manager, and therefore they would not take on the responsibility to get involved in the decision making process.*

*That brought us back to our question: Who leads who, how and why? We realize that there is a dynamic, an interplay between team and management (or in more general terms, leaders and "the led"). Leadership is not unilaterally located on the side of leaders. Instead we suppose that*

- we can only lead in the ways that the led will let us lead;*
- in which case they (here: the team) lead us to lead them in the ways they can accept to be led.*

*In the interplay between team and management this accounts for a (latent) potential for conflict wherever ideas about leadership differ. That can relate to decisions: Who decides on what, when, who, how, why? It can also relate to communicating decisions: "How best to tell them?" These two levels are touched on in the thoughts about tactical and structural alternatives. But it can further relate also to different levels, e.g. in questions of role representation (if the manager cultivates*

*a completely different style in appearance [dress, hair, attire etc.] than the educators).*

*We understand that leadership and management are not the same. If in a team discussion without a manager a decision has to be made, there will also be someone who takes up a leader position in the situation (e.g. making a crucial proposal, develop a plan). Hence leadership does not necessarily need management. Taking the thought as a starting point that we can only lead in ways that the led accept, we looked at the term personnel management from a different perspective. This term is turned around in a funny way: It is the personnel that leads the leaders (management)!*

*At the same time however, we see the interplay, the dynamic of lived reality in/with teams. In this regard the question then is, are not both perspectives too restricted (management leads personnel, vs. personnel leads management)?*

*What we take from this discussion is the insight that we need to look at concepts of leadership and management in more detail. And also, what do they mean for us, how do we use them (in talking, thinking), how do we transfer them into action/s in lived reality in the concrete situations in our jobs.*

*We also thought about the control of emotions that was part of the results in the analysis of the text. We are aware that there is a general assumption that showing emotions is seen as a weakness. In our discussion we often used formulations like "working professionally", "act like a pro" when we related to control of emotions. This could be translated into: "A pro needs to keep emotions under control."*

*We realize that accepting such a proposal as a requirement is a conflictual demand. We had the example of the phone call that makes me so angry that in the midst of it I simply press the cancel button. This example was commented on: "Well, probably not really professional." And at the same time there is the request to be authentic, but that would mean: let it out!*

*We find the idea of self-control and composure in our professional field as a demand on educators to control their emotions towards, and in presence of children. (Which emotions are actually meant by this? Does it apply to all emotions in the same way?)*

*And we find it also in our interpretation of the memory-scene, here translated into a demand (and tactic) on the side of the deputy*

manager, mirrored in the reverse by the impulsive (hence equivalent to childish) expression of anger on the side of the educator.

In this context the question came up whether men lead differently. We agreed that for the pre-school sector we could not answer this based on experience, but it is a possible route for further investigation. Whereby we should not fall behind the insights gained already that leadership and management are not the same.

Another question that arose was, how far it would be possible in pre-schools to establish a purely authoritarian management style. We shared the assumption that this would most likely fail due to resistance of personnel—i.e. the personnel management in the (reversed) sense as above—because the manager is dependent on the cooperation of personnel and in the pre-school sector in Germany there are certain standards of partnership and collaboration established already that would be hard to reverse.

We again came back to the idea of control of emotions in the reference to division of labor, i.e. hands and heads, the one physical, material, the other mental, conceptual, thereby mirroring a dichotomy of body and mind, emotion and reason. We see the historical development that led to a difference in value assigned to the two sides, and in organizational structures (here: institutional work context) the establishment of a hierarchy, i.e. the dominance of heads over hands. This is amply confirmed when we look at structural conditions, decision making powers, lines of command, payment.

In our further discussions we should not forget the function of management. It is not only a question of who leads who, how and why... we also need to bridge to the concrete actions, the actual lived practice and also the public mandate of the (community owned) pre-schools. We briefly touched on this in our initial discussion already. And connected to this terms like planning, coordination, control, presentation etc. will most likely come into play again.

### 4.3 IT WAS SO INTENSE

The example shows how working with the memory-scenes gains its essential value via integration into the topical context and in reference to it during the topical transfer phase of the text-analysis. In their collective search for greater clarity in face of experiencing contradiction in their lived reality and in the patterns of explanation at hand the successive analyses of the memory scenes help the participants to discover an increasingly complex entanglement of historical developments, structural circumstances and individual actions. Clarity and complexity do not stand against each other. In fact, only the increased understanding of the complexity can lead to greater clarity.

As noted above the example presented here does not come from an academic project. It originates in a project of continuing professional development. For the question of the potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning this is of particular interest. In the field of pre-school education in Germany reflective praxis has been established as a standard part of qualitatively good work practices. The practical implementation of this standard however cannot simply be taken for granted. Due to shortage of personnel many members of staff in these institutions accumulate high number of extra hours, fill in for sick colleagues and close gaps in the staff rosters. As a material reality this is also a background for the memory-scene that was used as example above. In cases where a service provider cannot fill their posts it is often a case that times that are planned for praxis reflection are cut short and staff fulfill other duties instead.<sup>19</sup>

Hence even in this sector it is not a matter of course that employees give time and effort to a process of reflection as intense as in this Collective Memory-Work project. A crucial factor in the project was the support of the professional services advisor who made sure that the participants were free of other duties during the groups' meetings, and that they could count their participation as regular working hours.

The topical discussions in this project span across an incredible bandwidth, e.g. differences in demands on pedagogical practice in different institutions, pedagogy vs. administration, labor and wages, historical models of authority

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19 This applies similarly across the different providers, state, church, private sector.

and their relation to contemporary pedagogy, public mandate and practical implementation, personal and social responsibility, individual spaces for action within bureaucratic structures, use-value of pedagogical work and production of use-value in pedagogical work, hierarchy and organization of labor.

Seven meetings did not suffice to discuss all these topics in detail. The time at hand and the intense questioning of seemingly self-evident common sense theories in the text-analyses however had lasting effects for the participants.

"What I have learned is that the exchange of thought with others was very useful for me. These nearly philosophical discussions that we had. To think about certain concepts, why do I use this term in this manner, or why do I associate this with the role of deputy manager, exactly this term? I guess, the result is simply a deeper engagement with the topic, with all the concepts that are part of it. We had the opportunity to speak about the whole package, authority, directive power, respect, acceptance. And we became much more aware of what all is part of this role or this topic. At the beginning you always asked: 'What can a manager do differently than an educator? What is your motivation to do something? What difference does it make?' And then I came up with a few examples and you said: 'Well, an educator can do that too.' I know, that made me furious because I didn't know any more why I would want to be manager at all. At the end of the day anyone can do that somehow. (laughs)"

"How we discussed those things, and how we picked them apart. Leadership, for instance, who leads who and why? (laughs) Such buzzwords, or phrases. I had never thought about what actually is contained in them. And this dissecting: What do you mean by this? What do I mean by this? What do Tina or Tim mean by it? What is contained in it? And then, 'Yes, what do I actually mean by it? At the moment I don't in fact know myself what I mean.' Like that. (laughs)"

"[Collective Memory-Work has the] great advantage that it really changes your thoughts. It triggers processes of maturation, and that is something extraordinary. How many methods would have such an impact? The price to pay is time. Searching for a story, writing the story, the meetings, space, a venue, time, particularly the time. It is a lot to invest. You also get a lot back. I found these meetings really very, very enriching. What we learn in management meetings and what we then also have to apply somehow, basic skills and so on, of course there is reflection involved also. But that

sticks to the surface level, it never reaches the same depth as what we did [in the Collective Memory-Work]."

"It was a very interesting experience. I think it is a good thing, but on my own I couldn't do it. If the group could continue somehow, meet regularly and discuss and work on other topics also, that would be even more enriching than a once off that is more or less finished now."

"There is a bit of melancholy over it ending now. For me it was not only fun, it has really brought a lot of new thoughts and questioning, critical thinking. And I even feel a bit de-romanticized. That is probably also why I am less stressed now. I no longer feel I have to perform a hundred percent here, and a hundred percent there and everyone should say 'wow, you're great how you do it all at once,' patting shoulders and so on. Now I don't demand even more of myself and I can settle with what I have achieved, even if it is not everything I would wish for. And part of de-romanticizing is probably also that not everything all the time needs to be peace, pals and pancakes. To get that clear was something valuable."

[Collective Memory-Work] is something special, something different that you cannot compare with the odd questionnaire or reflection processes. There is no-one who tells you what is wrong or right. Instead you can look from outside in on you. That is a special feature."

And in reply to the question whether this is a feature inherent to the method, or does it derive from the group composition: "Both, I would say. If the professional service advisor had been part of the group, you can be sure (laughs) we would not have spoken in the same manner. But the method is definitely what challenges you. You expose yourself to some degree with the story, and that is scrutinized, questioned, dissected, taken apart. I believe that is essential to the method. And that is also why on hindsight I take so much out of it. It really goes to the core. It isn't, yes (laughs) it isn't just a bit of hokey-cokey. And I believe that was the feeling we all shared. Each of us sat there and looked in squares when the own story was dissected. And everyone said: 'Wow, was that difficult to keep the mouth shut.' And then it was for everyone: 'Uurgh, it is my turn now.' But also exciting: 'It is my turn!' I guess that is what we all had in common. It was so exciting and different because it was so intense. And that is definitely the method. Sure, the group plays a role. If I don't trust the group I don't want them to dissect my story. You wouldn't want to be put down either."



## 5      PRESTO, PER FAVORE

The Trade Union Building, Saturday morning.

Maggie: Hi Paul, good to see you.

Paul: Hi Maggie, hi John. Thanks for waiting. I collected Tina, that's why it took a bit longer.

John: No worries, hi Tina.

Tina: Good morning, and thanks also for having me. When Paul told me about you I was hooked straight away. I'm curious to hear what you are at.

John: At present productive uncertainty and embodied experiences after an extensive wine-tasting session, I guess.

Maggie: John likes to talk in riddles. I was on a tour with colleagues yesterday and that still echoes a bit.

Paul: Embodied, no doubt, that means you actually read the papers?

Maggie: We did indeed.

Paul: What would you like to start with?

Maggie: We didn't discuss that yet. Should I simply pick something and then we'll see how it goes?

John: Fine, go ahead. I have a little cheat slip that I can take out later.

Maggie: The example of the educators is encouraging. Obviously it isn't all academics who do Collective Memory-Work. But I am not sure, how did they get on with the text-analysis. All we see is the result. But how does it work as a process? That question comes up for me because of my experiences with continuing professional development seminars for teachers. I am stunned every time. They constantly complain about their students in school having such a little attention span because they play with their mobile phones during class. And now these teachers sit together in a seminar room, guess what they do?

John: Play with their mobile phones.

Maggie: Obviously not all of them, but it happens over and over, particularly when things get a bit more complex. And this way of doing text-analysis, the deconstruction and all, that may not be everyday business I guess.

Paul: It requires a certain engagement. You cannot consume Collective Memory-Work like a lecture or a film. Either you are part of it or you are better somewhere else.

John: But even if I am highly motivated, such a way of looking at text takes a good deal of getting used to. Does it have to be so complicated, the table and all?

Paul: The table is not a rule. You can work differently with the texts. You may remember the questions that the Australian group suggested in *Emotion and Gender*. Are there commonalities, are their differences between the stories? Are there reoccurring elements that are not immediately obvious? How is language used, are clichés or metaphors used? Are there generalizations in the story? Are there contradiction? What are the cultural imperatives that are worked into the text?

Tina: That is quite similar to the first volumes of *Frauenformen*.

Paul: Frigga Haug's guest lectures in Australia date back to the 1980s. The groups over there picked up the stage of development at that time and they worked with it in their own ways, also developing new formats.

Tina: Tables have something unique. They are both helpful and restrictive. They suggest an exactness that in real life never exists.

Maggie: When I think of tables I'm always reminded of the living tableaux in Michel Foucault's study on prisons and similar institutions. Each individual has their own place, and each place its individual. He speaks of a micro-physics of cellular power.<sup>20</sup>

John: I had a look at this table and there were a few things that I put on my cheat-sheet. I remember when we spoke in the train how you explained that in the initial reading the group looks for the author's message and the common sense theories, and that it is good to make them conscious so that they don't interfere at the later stages of the text-analysis. But in the table there is also the context of the scene and the title of the story. Are they not clear in advance?

Paul: If a group works with an open topic, say something like *A time when I got hurt* or *A time when I hurt someone*, these stories can be located in all sorts of contexts. It is worth noting and considering the different contexts that may come up. And for the title, there are different practices in the writing process. The template suggests that memory-scenes are written on

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20 Foucault (1991:141-49)

the trigger topic, but the authors don't give the story a separate title. This is left to the group during the first phase of empathic reading. It is part of a process of handing over ownership of the story to the group. There is a distinction between ownership and authorship. The author is acknowledged as the one who wrote the story. But once the story is put to the group, it moves into collective ownership for the time of the process of working with it.

Tina: I can see what that does. For the author, on the one hand there is a loss of authority over interpretation, but on the other hand it opens up a chance for revision and re-interpretation. New perspectives.

John: There's a few other things in that template. You go through the bother of doing all this identifying of context, message, common sense etc., and then you put it away?

Paul: The idea is to consciously apply different approaches in the analysis of the text. The fact that the empathic understanding happened and has been recorded means it does not need to happen again, it does not need to interfere with the distanced reading and understanding. But to have the head free for the distanced understanding it is helpful to not constantly go back to the level of empathic understanding.

Maggie: It sounds a bit like crutches, procedures as a means to keep on track.

Paul: It takes into account our tendencies to mix and mingle different approaches. Each of them has its own value. Separating them allows to see their impact on our thinking clearer. At the end of the process it is possible also to bring them together in a new composition.

Tina: But it was only in the last example that the table was mentioned. Did other groups use it also?

Paul: That differs. The women of the Hayward Collective worked with the table. Groups who do Collective Biography normally don't use it. They search the texts for traces of discourses without doing an explicit analysis of the elements of language used. And there are other variations. Ralph Hammond in a project about professional identity of physiotherapists starts off with the narrative structure of a text, orientation, complication, resolution and evaluation. Then he determines setting, time, actors, sequence of events, the plot and the consequences in the story. And finally he moves on to questions like: Why was exactly this story chosen? Is there coherence in the narrative? How does it relate to the initial discussions of

the group? What values and beliefs are contained in the story, and how do they relate to prevailing cultural beliefs or meta-narratives?

John: My goodness, that sounds just as complicated as the table.

Paul: The table and the question asked of the text are a means of support. The table is a way to produce a well-arranged overview of the elements that are used in the text. It helps to not forget anything essential. You can concentrate on one issue at a time. I think it makes life easier.

John: I am not at all sure about all the boxes in the table. Are they really necessary? Or else, would there not be other categories possible?

Paul: The template that was used by the pre-school teachers is just this, a template. It will be of great help if a group does text-analysis for the first time. But then each group will adjust the categories to their own needs. It is an instrument, and it is to be used flexibly. Take the box with the connections. This is something that many groups don't consider putting in. Others have enhanced it by including a section called irritations where they find passages in the memory-scene puzzling but they want to take note of them separately to white spots or contradictions.

Maggie: Do participants not disagree about the entries? That is also what I meant by process. Who finally decided what in the text is an emotion and what is not? In the text of Anna and Anke for example the group found that the characters in the story are angry. Could you not just as well say there is courage when Anna goes determinedly to tell Anke what she has decided, or satisfaction at the end when Anna thanks Anke and goes?

Tina: Ways of reading are different. That is always the case when a group works with a text. I guess, if you look closely at the table, everyone will find something they would categorize differently. For example with the linguistic peculiarities, they refer to content in their table but I would not see that as a linguistic peculiarity. I would list it probably in a separate category, surprises, observations or so.

Paul: The process is part of gaining clarity. You talk about the different perceptions and you try to find the most plausible explanation. This is how the table eventually fills up. Emotions, linguistic peculiarities, the use of language, metaphors and clichés are nearly all the time a matter of different initial opinions.

Maggie: And is there a specific way in Collective Memory-Work at the end of the process when it comes to formulating the reconstruction of characters, or the topical transfer?

Paul: During a session there may be keywords or a few sentences collected on a poster, but crucially someone in the group takes notes and writes up a draft version that is then discussed, probably amended according to input from the rest of the group. Sorry for being a bit mundane in this regard.

Maggie: Never mind. Would it help to record the group discussion?

Paul: That is always an option. People who use the method for academic projects frequently do that. But is it necessary? I guess it depends on the purposes. If a group wishes to draw on a documentation of their processes of thought as dense as possible it makes sense.

John: But is it feasible? You spoke about the institutional context earlier.

Paul: You are right, in some cases it is actually not feasible to work with recordings of meetings. I just say, they are another source of information to draw on if we want to find out how we work ourselves into social structures in given historical circumstances.

Tina: What I found quite impressive are the feedback passages where they speak about the group itself. How important the group seems to be for them, to the point that at the end they are even sad that the project comes to an end.

John: That is something I also have on my cheat-sheet. It sounds nearly too good to be true.

Paul: This is probably a bit cherry-picking. The papers present examples for particular purposes.

Maggie: They are meant to be an encouragement, or not?

Tina: That's why I immediately jumped on the bandwagon when Paul mentioned the meeting with you. So far I have only read about Collective Memory-Work, or else Paul told me about it. I would like to try it myself some time.

Maggie: I'm the same. What about you, John?

John: Oops, that is a bit fast now. I would rather want to come back to the cherry-picking. Are there examples of projects that failed? Or some that didn't work out as planned?

Paul: Good question. First, there is a problem that has nothing to do with the method as such. It is the question of what gets published at all. Most publications on Collective Memory-Work come from within academia, and there is fierce competition. No-one likes to present a failure. Accordingly, if a project doesn't work out well, it is easily swept under the carpet. You are

more likely to get such information if you talk directly to people. But I have to say, over the last few years I spoke to more than a hundred people all of whom took part in projects of all sorts of formats, shorter, longer, in different countries, on different topics. There was nobody who said it was an awful experience. Some would say it was too much time and effort. Some would find it too text-heavy. In one case I remember someone saying the theoretical framework that the group followed didn't sit well with her and therefore she decided to leave the project. That's all, other than that, there was no negative feedback.

Maggie: In real life there are certainly obstacles for groups.

Tina: Isn't that like everywhere else? A date has been agreed and last minute someone remembers that it is their mother's birthday. Everyone comes to the agreed venue just to see that nobody booked the room.

Paul: A date has been agreed and everyone is supposed to bring their written memory-scene to the meeting, but two of the group did not get to write it. The minutes of the last meeting are not circulated in time before the next meeting and people cannot prepare properly.

John: That sound like Trade Union Tales, Volume 16. But I have something else on my sheet. One of the participants in the pre-school project said, if the professional services advisor had taken part in the project the others would not have spoken as openly. Wasn't it the professional services advisor who made the project possible in the first place? That rang a bell. I can well understand them, I had my own experiences in the past with supervisors at work. And on the other hand I'm not sure, is that not also a missed opportunity?

Paul: You can't be sure, it would have to be tested. At any rate it points to the problem of status based on formal roles. That was already an issue for the people at CCCS in the 1980s. The group there was made up of postgraduate students, but their supervisor was also part of it. Retrospectively some see it as a field of tension.<sup>21</sup>

Maggie: Wait a second, weren't the women in the Hayward Collective also on their way to their dissertation? And wasn't Mary Hermes also a lecturer who took part in the group? I don't remember anything about tension in their report.

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21 Clare and Johnson (2000)

Tina: That may be a question of how people define themselves, and how others define them. The more status is internalized as a separating motif the smaller the chance to find shared interests across supposed status boundaries.

Maggie: There is some irony in it. They turn around the concept of personnel management and understand how they are supposed to act out the position of deputy manager in a specific manner. To avoid conflict with colleagues they assume it is better to give orders, but at the same time only in a particular way, and so on. Via status constructions divisions among staff are nailed down which they experience as obstructive in their everyday practice. And then they do the same with the professional services advisor.

Paul: That could have been a next step in the topical discussions in this group. But don't forget, their project had a fixed time frame and this statement came up in a feedback interview. Maybe since then they see that point themselves. At any rate it is a problem area for Collective Memory-Work. A friend of mine is head of a department in a further education institution. She once asked me, would I offer a project in their department for staff to reflect on their experiences at work. The project never happened because the staff members didn't want to enter into it. Some of the team were on permanent contracts. Others were temporary. Of those again some had been promised permanency, others not. Who was offered a permanent contract was heavily dependent on performance reports. These reports were regularly written by the head of department and passed on to HR. Beyond a surface level the relationships in the team were not particularly trusting.

John: And this head of department was a friend of yours?

Paul: Yes. She suggested to the team to use Collective Memory-Work as a method for reflection on their work. She did not even intend to take part herself. But the fact that the suggestion came from her was enough for the team to stay away from it.

John: Maybe some of them were in the union and had been advised of potential consequences. At least that is what I would have told them.

Paul: Completely understandable. I just think if the suggestion wasn't coming from the head of the department, had it come from one of the team members, maybe they would have reacted differently.

Tina: That's speculation. But what the example shows is how much the institutional context has an effect on a project. In this case even to the point where the project simply doesn't happen at all. Now, let me make another attempt. I would really like to try Collective Memory-Work. Maggie, John, would you like to get a group going together?

Maggie: As I said already, you can count on me.

John: I don't know would I have the sticking power for the text-analysis. I read a lot and I like it, but analysis? I simply prefer thinking straight instead of thinking in twists and turns around bends and corners.

Maggie: If you don't get into gear, then Tina and I will go ahead alone. We will find a few others. But if you were to stop your whinging, there might be a new experience in reach for you also. Presto, per favore.

John: Mamma mia, alright, alright, I'm in.



## **6 HURDLES, TRAPS AND PITFALLS**

Maggie's observation in the last chapter is accurate. Not only can a book be fun to read. In the case of this one it is also meant as an encouragement to use the potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning. Nevertheless it is important to know about the obstacles that one can encounter, and be prepared for them. The pool of experiences accumulated over the last 30 years makes it possible to point out areas that can be difficult.

There are a number of logistical and organizational aspects that are not specifically unique to Collective Memory-Work. They rather concern general issues that have to be addressed in all kinds of group projects. Who can take part? Are there actually enough participants? What is the required time commitment? Where can meetings be held? Who takes on coordination tasks? What material is needed and how can it be sourced? How is communication among participants organized? Finding solutions for such problems is a basic requirement for each and every project. The following sections however will deal with aspects that are more specific for Collective Memory-Work.

### **6.1 AUTHOR - TEXT - IDENTITY**

Memory-scenes can easily be written as documents of self-affirmation. In some sense they all are actually exactly that. It can become a problem if authors are not in a position to release their texts to be used by the group as material for text-analysis and particularly the distanced understanding.

In the group of men in Nottingham that was mentioned already the participants brought different approaches to writing and interpreting text into the project. One of them said that frequently texts of a "celebratory character" were presented to the group. What he meant is that for the authors these texts had a sort of sacred status. Such a phenomenon can already show in the writing style. It becomes obvious latest at the time of collectively working with the text when authors do not like to allow their distanced analytic reading. In the concrete situation during a group's meeting that can lead to tension.

An experience on a similar level was reported by Karin Hansson in a project in Sweden. Six artists did a Collective Memory-Work on the topic of "Work". The project took place at the Royal Institute of Arts in Stockholm (Hansson 2020). The practical adaptation of the method largely followed the suggestions made by the Australian collective (Crawford et al. 1992). Retrospectively Karin Hansson identifies a problem area specific for this group of participants.

She rightly says memory-scenes written in Collective Memory-Work don't necessarily have to be particularly entertaining or crafted writing. They also should be free of interpretation and reflection. "This was perhaps the big challenge. As an artist, you are trained to keep control of all kinds of expressions and not let go of something that you don't consider to be of enough quality artistically. Art is also about reflecting on and tapping into one's own feelings about the situation, rather than considering the situation in detail. Instead, submitting to the method and generating some sort of neutral 'data' is about stepping out of one's professional identity as an artist, an identity that you take very seriously and do not put away so easily" (Hansson 2020:118).

Hence Karin Hansson assumes that the professional identity of the participants as artists stood in the way of unhampered writing. "Submitting to the method goes against the self-image where the artist's identity is strongly linked to finding and owning his/her personal expression and creating his/her own and constantly new rules. Although everyone agreed to follow the method, there was an unspoken resistance and the forms and rules were constantly questioned. Therefore, all memories came to be described in very different ways, and sometimes even in opposition to the method" (ibid:128). This relates to the texts been written in an overly stylish manner. Karin Hansson speaks of "small tightly written short stories" that could be seen "more as curated artistic expressions than written accounts of memories." This material made it "difficult to look behind the stories and reach the structures" (ibid:120).

Similar to celebratory texts: If the authors see the written story as a product of art, and if this view is shared by the entire group, a distanced analysis can become a problem. In the project in Stockholm that led to reverting back to discussions focusing on the author and the author's intentions. Such discussions easily let the emancipatory potential of working with the memory-scenes disappear over constantly stewing in the own juice. You start searching for what the author *really wanted to say*, instead

of paying attention to what was *really said*, what linguistic means were employed and how that what was really said (including contradictions and white spots) relates back to the topic of the project.

Collective Memory-Work is not about evaluating or praising memory-stories for their artistic quality. For participants who are used to view the world through such lenses the distanced analytic approach can be an obstacle. To gain a new perspective they would need to bring a new perspective to their perception of the texts. What appears as a paradox here is ideally transferred into a process of learning. There is obviously no guarantee that this is possible in each and every project. It has to be tested. Whether or not it was possible in the project of the artists in Stockholm is not fully clear from Karin Hansson's report.

She sees the professional identity of the participants at the core of their attachment as authors to their texts. The self-images ascribed to an artist are at the same time intertwined with historically specific materiality of being an artist. "In the gig economy of the artistic precariat, there are no free spaces, instead everything is a kind of production place where anything can be transformed into artistic expression or lead to important contacts. There is also a view within the art world that everything you do is art and therefore in a way also public. There was never any violation of, for example, the rule that 'what is said in the room stays in the room,' but despite this and a generous and kind atmosphere, there was a basic caution. This caution can also be due to the fact that some in the group knew each other too well, and wanted to keep a certain distance and not cross the limit of what friendship can endure. Sometimes it is easier to talk to strangers than to friends with whom you share complicated pasts." And Karin Hansson notes that the group "would have needed better insights and perhaps guidance on how this could be handled" (ibid:129). Here the specific form of individuality comes into play: artists as individuals in competition with each other for limited funding opportunities from public (or private) sources. Karin Hansson's report is a reminder that the specific situation of participants, the conditions of life, their personal, professional and political entanglements with the respective affiliations and loyalties filter through to the level of working within a group. As a general insight this is not new, but it is worth remembering that it also plays a role for Collective Memory-Work. If these entanglements are not made conscious they can be a latent hindrance for a group to use the method to its full potential.

## 6.2 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

For participants in a project doing Collective Memory-Work it is necessary to have obtained a level of proficiency in the language used by the group that allows for actively taking part in a discussion. They need to be able to write a memory-scene in the respective language, and to read and understand the texts of the other group members. In light of the focus on working with written stories such a suggestion at first sight seems trivial. However, it is not so unusual that questions regarding language proficiency become important.

Annika Zemp and Franziska Stier worked on a project that looked at the everyday experiences of asylum seekers, refugees without stay permit, and migrants without papers in Basel, Switzerland. They had hoped to use Collective Memory-Work for their study. Fully in line with the character of the method as depicted in this book they state: "Not only is it a method for research, it also highlights the possibility of self-empowerment . . . . It blurs the boundaries between teachers and learners so that at the end of the day everyone takes part equally in a collective process of investigation and learning from each other" (Zemp & Stier, 2020, 15).

In the practical implementation of their plan they found it difficult to bring together a group of participants with these backgrounds in the time frame set for their project. They could however work together with a woman from East Africa and a man from South America with whom they conducted extensive interviews and put together a photo-documentation of places where they felt either at home or being a stranger. All four then, interviewer and interviewees, wrote memory-scenes on the trigger sentence "A time when I felt at home in Basel", or "A time when I felt being a stranger in Basel." Among themselves the four communicated in German, but they decided "each of us to write in their native language . . . in the hope that this is the language everyone feels 'at home' in and therefore has a comfortable route into their emotions and memories, and will be able to express them" (ibid:16). But they find that the translation efforts during the analytic work with the texts could not prevent loss of information and clarity in the narratives.

That is not too surprising. In every translation some of the particularities of meaning that are conveyed in the (vernacular) use of language will get lost. Translating a memory-scene will always bring a new voice into the text and

affect the original construction. Most Collective Memory-Work projects with international group compositions use English as their working language. In a project that took place in Ireland<sup>22</sup> the six participants came from Poland, Scotland, Germany, France, Slovakia and Belgium. Five of the group lived in Ireland for a long time already. It became clear very soon that the language proficiency of the sixth participant was not sufficient. She was only a short time in Ireland. For managing her everyday life her English was good enough, but already the writing of the memory-scene proved to be a difficulty. In the ensuing group discussions a lot of details were lost on her and she could not express her thoughts adequately in English either. After three meetings she left the group.

The departure of a participant does not have to be a problem for the overall implementation of a project plan. In the case just mentioned the other five did regret her leaving, but for the further work of the group it had no lasting effect. One reason for that may be that the group did not have an existing work relationship prior to the start of their project. Everyone had joined the group on basis of a shared topical interest, in that regard it was a newly established group.

For groups which are in existence already in contexts independent of a Collective Memory-Work project, and which are made up of people from different linguistic backgrounds it is at any rate advisable to be aware of the problems that language can pose when using the method. It is surely desirable in, e.g. political groups with refugees to learn from each other and to exchange personal experiences. But for a group that does not have at least one language in which everyone can communicate confidently and secure enough to enter into reflexive discussions other forms of exchange are certainly a better option.

### **6.3 DISPLACEMENT, TRANSFER AND DISLOCATION**

It cannot be said often enough, Collective Memory-Work should be more than just writing and analyzing memory-scenes. Without their integration in an overarching process of topical discussion they will remain on a purely

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([http://www.sligoschoolproject.net/?page\\_id=2197](http://www.sligoschoolproject.net/?page_id=2197)).

anecdotal level. That may be entertaining, but it does not offer the same potential for learning.

The initial topic for a project that is based on a problematic from lived experience needs to be fashioned into a writing trigger. Maria Jansson, Maria Wendt and Cecilia Ase have thought about this process. In two essays (2008, 2009) they describe how they dealt with it in a seminar at the Department of Political Science at Stockholm University. The topic for the project was "Gender and Nation," and students were asked to write "A memory of a flag." In their descriptions of this project they take up the notion of dislocating the problem that was found in the second volume of the *Frauenformen* publications (Haug et al. 1987).

There the group describes how they closed in on their own experiences in relation to female sexualization. In this process seemingly well settled knowledge became increasingly questionable. "The theme we chose was one that weighed heavily on all of us. In expressing a collective interest of 'sexualization,' we acknowledged each other as experts on everyday life, rather than as scene-stealing rivals. In our identification of that theme, we located one of the points at which we bound ourselves into society. Since our life process is always a process of socialization, that binding into society should not in itself be seen as restrictive. It should on the other hand be made conscious, since this makes clear the process whereby we have absorbed existing social scientific theories, ideologies and everyday opinions. This terrain of investigation into which we enter is not uninhabited; other settlers have been here before us . . . . Our gaze was, as it were, no longer innocent – if indeed it ever was. In order to reinstate a less predetermined way of seeing, we tried in our own work to formulate an initial problematic by combining together the key elements both of our own prior practical knowledge, and of theoretical knowledge we had hitherto acquired; it was only after this preparatory stage that we began to write the stories of our own memories" (ibid:54).

The memory stories paved the way to "linkages that appeared new and exciting, even strange, yet which were immediately recognized by the group as credible, since they formed part of all our memories. We believe it is necessary to pursue these connections, using them as a basis for the elaboration of a research problematic, as well as for historical research whenever possible: write new stories around them, drawing on existing theory for their partial elucidation . . . . This is one way of learning from

experience, from the empirical. The principal effect of such a procedure is a *displacement* of the problem of 'the sexual'" (ibid:54-5).

For the collective of *Frauenformen* this process led to a departure from the over-used term of sexuality (and all too well known concepts surrounding it). "Writing and discussing [the first] stories . . . left us with a feeling of helplessness; how were we to identify means of defending ourselves against the forms of oppression they described? No matter how far back they went, these stories always depicted the results of an already existing repression of sexuality. . . . In an attempt then to discover the origins of our deficiencies and our discontents in the domain of the sexual, we decided at an early point in our research to focus our study on our relationships to our bodies and to their development" (ibid:74). They subsequently started working in four separate working groups, each taking up a *dislocated* topic (hair, legs, body, slavegirl project). By working in this way they discovered new connections as "parts of our lives to which we had hitherto paid little attention. And without doubt, studying them constitutes not only an enrichment of our practical and theoretical lives; it may possibly also bring to light relations initially obliterated from memory for structural reasons - either because they provided the unconscious foundation for the building of existing structures, or because they represented lost bastions of resistance. Whatever the reason, it was certainly worthwhile to pursue these linkages further in our stories" (ibid:55).

Against this background Maria Jansson and her colleagues develop their approach for deciding on a writing trigger in their seminar. They distinguish two variations of displacement which they call *transfer* and *dislocation*. In their understanding both of these variations are already included in the 1983 project of the *Frauenformen* collective: "The change in focus—from sexuality to the concrete, lived female body—clearly manifests the different aspects of displacement. By focusing on experiences of specific situations or incidents, the problem of women's sexuality is transferred to a concrete and tangible context. The problem has also been dislocated, from sexuality to different parts of the body" (Jansson et al. 2008:233).

They find that in many adaptations of Collective Memory-Work a topic is transferred to a level of concrete experiences, situations, incidents. "For example, Karin Widerberg (1998) describes how she asks students to write memory stories about a specific occasion when they "felt like a woman/man." These stories are then used to theorize gender relations. Here, Widerberg has transferred the theoretical problem of gender relations

to a specific situation and to an experience of a feeling of belonging to a certain gender, but other than that, both the theoretical problem (gender theory) and the theme of the stories (feelings of belonging to a certain gender) concern gender constructions" (Jansson et al. 2008:233).

They also recount similar approaches in their own adaptations of Collective Memory-Work with political science students (e.g. "feeling like a man/woman," or "feeling Swedish"). For the authors of the memory-scene this means that they have to construct themselves as subjects of a particular category, or in demarcation of it, but always in relation to preconceived notions of this particular category. Accordingly these stories inform about self-construction and "provide an understanding of how abstract concepts are conceived and how they materialize in the specific, lived reality" (ibid:234).

In their seminar on "Gender and Nation" however they deliberately worked with a *dislocation* of the research problem. The writing trigger "A memory of a flag" no longer points to a theoretically developed problematic or concept. Instead it aims at a lived (remembered) reality in which the theoretically pre-existing problematic or concept wants to be discovered first. The participants in the seminar wrote stories about childhood, family, traditions, summer and pastoral landscapes, rituals, funerals, birthdays and graduation days, often including strong emotions and sentimentality in relation to the flag and the nation. Maria Jansson and her colleagues argue "that the memory work that focuses on the flag provides us with a form of understanding of nation and gender that differs qualitatively from the analysis of 'feeling like ...'. The 'flag' stories enable interpretations of how 'the nation' is created by establishing senses of 'natural' belonging and harmony. An analysis and theorization of these stories can shed light on processes and everyday practices that have important emotional and corporeal aspects" (ibid.).

And they conclude that in many cases the transfer of a research problem into a concrete, material context can be fruitful. In their opinion then consciously dislocating the research problem "is a more rewarding and challenging approach. . . . In other words, it is when we look somewhere else for what we are looking for that we are able to come up with new interpretations and understandings of power relations and social phenomena" (ibid:235).

The format of the writing trigger is also a matter of concern for Anne-Jorunn Berg (2008). She describes the adaptation of Collective Memory-



Work that was used by two White female researchers to clarify their own position prior to entering into a research project on the meaning of the term "ethnic minority woman" (orig. *Invandrerkvinn*) in Norway. For their project they had intended to conduct interviews with a number of women who would fit into this category. But they found it difficult to identify such women without underhand employing racial categories. Too much were stereotypes at play which the two researchers had unintentionally reproduced themselves. Hence they started a process of reflection in which they used memory-stories. "Our memory work on whiteness was originally a small scale 'pre-qualification' designed to improve our take on the main project. The intention was to clarify our understandings of race and racialization as a way to position the main project. We intended to destabilize race and, simultaneously, to situate our own production of knowledge. . . . [W]e employed memory work to help avoid reproducing stereotypical images of the category 'ethnic minority woman.' We wanted to create openness and locate our knowledge production through articulation of whiteness as racialized experiences and as categorization" (ibid:218).

They agreed to write about "A point when I experienced myself as white." A writing trigger fashioned like this fits the notion of transfer as depicted above. The topic (research problem), here Whiteness and racialization, is transferred from the level of theoretical and conceptual discussion to the level of experience. Everyday life is searched for situations that may fit the category. Retrospectively Anne-Jorunn Berg remarks that they could have benefited from a longer consideration of the format of the writing trigger. She observes that initially the trigger didn't trigger memories at all, and she explains this with the experience of Whiteness being so much outside of consciousness for White people that it is difficult to even think of concrete situations that would fit. She sees this all the more as an indication for the importance of engaging with the topic.

She further recognizes that once they did start writing it was difficult to describe the experiences in a concrete way. "Ideally memories should be concrete in the sense that they should deal with actions (what I did) and not ideas (what I thought about what I did). For academics trained in abstract thinking this may prove rather challenging. It was surprisingly easy to start writing about how I viewed my own involvement in the episodes the memories dealt with, or to write in terms of general reflections on the situation of whiteness in Norwegian society. We often ended up using the phrase 'when I think about being white,' even though we endlessly stressed

the importance of describing concrete action and not 'what I think'" (ibid:220). Their memory scenes were full of general observations of others and wherever they turned to personal elements irony at the expense of the author slipped in.

Anne-Jorunn Berg points out that those memory-scenes that are written more action-oriented "provided the richest and most interesting material", and she also attends to the question "whether the memories could become too concrete" because the "focus on concrete action sometimes led to exclusion of information about the context of the story, rendering the text unintelligible" (ibid:221-2). In her experience however "the lack of context in its own ways facilitated the discursive-oriented analysis of the memories. It seems that the lack of context helped us stay close to the text" (ibid:222).

What all of this makes clear is that the considerations regarding the writing trigger are worth a good deal of attention if a group wishes to reach beyond the simple transfer of a theoretical concept onto a more practical level of experience.

## **6.4 SENSITIVE TOPICS**

In the train conversation John associated analysis straight away with therapy. This reaction occurs frequently when people hear of Collective Memory-Work for the first time. It is a connection that is easily made if the terms memory and analysis are put forward without further explanation. It quickly rings bells of psychoanalysis which again is associated with therapy and soon enough you are on the wrong track. Differences between therapy and therapeutic effects were mentioned already and it should be clear at this stage that Collective Memory-Work is not therapy and that it should not be assessed along therapeutic yardsticks. In relation to hurdles, traps and pitfalls it is yet worthwhile to take a closer look at this complex.

A question that is often asked about Collective Memory-Work is, are there topics that are too sensitive and should be avoided because they in fact require therapy?

A number of projects were mentioned in earlier chapters. Their topics included, e.g. female sexualization, gender and emotion, body experiences, aging men, women in academia, professional experiences in pre-schools, gender specific appropriation of science. A cursory view through

documentation of projects around the globe over a thirty years period brings up a whole range of further examples: constructions of racism in research endeavors, learning experiences in schools, love relationships, living with HIV, homophobia among youths, gender constructions in appropriation and use of the internet, travel experiences of women, professional identity of physiotherapists, experiences with driving tests, male presentation in media and homosexual identity, experiences of working class women in universities, jealousy. The list could be extended.

None of these topics is too sensitive in itself. Collective Memory-Work relies on participants looking at memories (the own and the one of others) and analyze them *both empathically and distanced*. In principle it is possible for every topic to bring up memories that are emotionally disturbing, or even traumatic.

Prior to starting a project it is common standard in scientific research to do an assessment of ethical issues including potential risks for participants. The elasticity of a newly developed material for a bungee jumping rope will therefore most likely not be tested initially with living participants. The respective standards protect participants, and that is a good thing. Studies in the social sciences adhere to such standards as well. Accordingly researchers who intend to conduct an interview series will give time to thinking about impacts of the interview on participants, and how to deal with emotionally disturbing situations.

In a way the question of sensitive topics is not posed well. It one-sidedly looks at the topics as if it was possible to judge a topic by its formulation for what it might trigger in participants without considering group composition, framework of the project, individual backgrounds of participants or institutional context. Only a view on the entirety of influence factors in a project allows for an assessment of potential to churn up disturbing emotions in participants.

Asking the question of sensitive topics starts from the premise that there is such a thing as sensitive topics. This is right and wrong at the same time. It is correct if the social discourses are taken into account, and if the question aims at the probability of an average person sharing the dominant assumptions about the sensitivity of the respective topic that are prevalent in these discourses. It is wrong if these assumptions are seen as naturally given. It is furthermore wrong to assume that such an average person would exist in lived reality. This is a similarly simplifying fiction as any other categorization: the women, the men, the English, the Brazilians, the

migrants, the vegans etc. Such categorizations are a means of finding orientation on everyday level in the social with-and-against-each-other. But they always abstract from the concrete person. For an assessment of the sensitivity of a topic it makes more sense to look at the exact background and interests of the concrete participants, and the other influence factors as mentioned above.

Lungile Masinga initiated a project that included eight black female "Life Orientation" teachers in black South African schools. "Life Orientation" comprises learning areas in which matters of sexuality are part of the syllabus. The project aimed at exploring "how we saw ourselves as sexual beings and how that self-knowledge might translate into how we interpreted and taught sexuality education and related to the learners" (Masinga 2012:122). It was part of the research that Lungile Masinga conducted for her dissertation thesis. She had planned to use the group meetings as story-telling sessions only. Participants also wrote stories into a journal, whereby "only those stories we wanted to share would be told and those that we did not want to talk about, but were willing to write about, would remain in our journals for only the researcher (me) to read" (ibid:124). The idea behind this was that experiences with sexuality, sexuality education might be a sensitive topic and participants could feel unease about presenting and discussing their memories in a group setting.

However, Lungile Masinga reports that "in the end all the stories were told due to what I believe was the positive atmosphere that was created every time we met. I believe that it was also due to the genuine feeling of caring and understanding that appeared to be always present in the sessions" (ibid.). That included stories which are outside of what would be deemed everyday experiences. "In research literature that I had read, issues of sexuality had been identified as sensitive, thus needing extra care of the participants. This was even more so when dealing with memory, where participants will have to revisit certain parts of their past that may have been painful. As the process progressed, I started to wonder, what do sensitive issues mean and for whom is the issue sensitive? Is it for the person talking about the issue or the one listening and imagining that if it were them then it would be sensitive? . . . In my understanding of what could make an issue sensitive, is when one speaks of death, abuse, violence in relationships and so on you cannot help thinking of the traumatic nature of those issues. My assumption was that when a participant was retelling that kind of story she would experience a certain level of negative

flashbacks that might be harmful to her current mental stability. However, that has proved to not be the case for all participants in my study" (ibid:132).

According to Lungile Masinga, whether or not a topic is a sensitive one depends on the relationship between story-teller and listener. That is immediately comprehensible. In a different version it was an important aspect in the project of the Swedish artists also. There it was pointed out that in a certain way it can be easier to talk about sensitive issues with strangers than with close friends. And the degree of trust among members of a group was mentioned as a decisive factor. In the case of the teachers in South Africa "the nature of the environment that had been provided by collaborative participation, and the development of trust and care for all may have lessened the impact of the story. . . . Some of the stories shared by the participants seemed to fall within the 'sensitive category' such as when Malindi related her story of how her boyfriend shot her and her mother. The intensity and the details of the story, including the responses and questioning by other participants would have made some break down. However, she could not understand why we would think it would be difficult for her to relate the story. What we failed to realize was that for her, talking was what she saw as a beginning to healing" (ibid.).

Irrespective of institutional context, be it academic, self-organized, continuing professional development: Wherever a group starts using Collective Memory-Work the participants should be clear about the aim of the joint project. Empathy and understanding have to be seen in a relation of productive tension that can erupt as an issue to be negotiated at any time in the concrete process of working together. It cannot be predicted in advance when and in what intensity emotions that are better acknowledged and served on the spot will be triggered in participants.

Rebecca Eaker, Anneliese Singh and Corey Johnson report of a project in the USA about parents' reactions to children who don't conform to traditional gender roles. In the group's discussion the story of one group member "became an emotional focal point where the participants shared in empathy and listened to her describe how her father's disapproval impacted her well into her adulthood. The participants offered support and affirmation as [the author] continued to describe how she no longer has a relationship with her father as a result of his choice to require an inauthentic version of her. Through her tears, she expressed gratitude to the other participants for their support" (Eaker, Singh & Johnson 2018:55).

Empathic emotional feedback and support are on the one hand helpful to establish a basis of mutual trust within a group. On the other hand there is a need to move from empathy to distanced analysis for making understanding possible. "Empathy makes blind" wrote Frigga Haug (1977:229), and to overcome the blindness of empathy requires the distanced perspective. The question of how to deal with potentially triggered strong emotions cannot be answered with a standard recipe. What to do, e.g. if a group member in an outburst of anger pulls apart the collected memory-scenes of all the other participants? Or, if a group member starts crying while the group talks about her/his memory-scene?

In the first case the group, after a moment of silence, stopped working with the memory-scenes for that day and continued with other activities. In the second case the crying also triggered a moment of silence, but the group turned it into a shared laughter about themselves and their being so tightly captured in emotional chains. This in turn had the effect of releasing tension and after a short while the group worked together in even more productive ways than before.

Experience of menstruation is another topic that could easily be put into the sensitive-drawer. It was at the center of a project initiated by Glenda Koutroulis in Australia. In her reflections on the use of Collective Memory-Work as a sociological method she also attends to the issue of therapy. In her opinion research "at the interface between the individual and society" (Crawford et al. 1992:4) requires "not only a sociological imagination, but a sociological sensibility" (Koutroulis 2008:101). Participants in the group process may experience the process as "a sort of therapy in the ancient sense of clarifying one's knowledge of self" (C. W. Mills, in: Koutroulis 2008:101).

A similar orientation can be found in Erica Burman's discussion of the potential of Collective Memory-Work to be used in connection with models of group psycho-therapy. She sees overlaps where the focus is not on correction of individual experiences along the lines of the group's norms, but rather on the ways of reproducing (moral) norms by the group. She notes that Collective Memory-Work groups are not spaces in which to nestle cosily because the main aim is not the well-being of individual group members and the work process can be a painful process for some participants. She sees a parallel here with group-analytic forms of therapy in the tradition of S. H. Foulkes that aim at revealing pressure to conform and

at encouraging resistance (Burman 2002:92). A practical application that follows this pathway is not documented so far.

## **6.5 INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT, EXPECTATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF EXPECTATIONS**

There are a good few applications of Collective Memory-Work in third level teaching. Usually the respective seminars and courses are established by individual lecturers who themselves had some exposure to the method. For the students these seminars are per definition events of learning. Teaching and learning however are not the same, neither do they have to go hand in hand. What the teachers teach (or assume they teach) is by no means always what the learners learn. Learning is always bound to a learning environment, an (institutional) context that influences the learning processes in multiple ways, and notably in different ways in various contexts.

Paying tribute to the potential of a method of learning therefore requires to take into account the institutional context in which it is going to be applied. For adaptations of Collective Memory-Work in university seminars there are several examples documented in literature internationally (e.g., Breiter and Witt 1991; Schratz, Walker and Hadwich 1995; Kaufman 2008; Norquay 2008; Liinason 2009; Ovens & Tinning 2009; Grimwood & Johnson 2019; Witt-Löw 2020). In relation to potential hurdles, traps and pitfalls I will here refer to a contribution by Susan Heald in which she attends to effects that she observed in a gender studies course in Ontario, Canada (2004).

In her essay she states that students frequently have a problem with using autobiographical material and that they develop resistances towards the learning experiences on offer. In her search for reasons for such resistances Susan Heald touches on a number of aspects that are specific to the university context and its historical (and spatial) situatedness. She orders these aspects into four interwoven categories (knowledge-making practices, individualism/individuation, pedagogic practices, and institutional[ized] practices and politics) (Heald 2004:54ff.).

Susan Heald refers to the practice of maintaining disciplinary boundaries within academia with the purpose of inflating the value of one's discipline over others, and the establishment of protectionist barriers around claims of

ownership concerning specific knowledge or modes of knowledge production, e.g. defending autobiography as the supposed monopoly of the English department and therefore not legitimately transferable into sociology or gender studies. Such practices obviously run counter to the interdisciplinary nature and intentions of Collective Memory-Work. An understanding of science based on standardized measurability of research outputs stands in the way of establishing more open, discursive and interpretative practices of analysis and knowledge production.

Students who come into the respective institutional environment and take on the presumptions of such an understanding of science will necessarily struggle with the request for applying themselves in a project with a method that does not fit in with their normative presumptions. "Disciplines divide up and simplify a complex whole; positivism teaches that only the 'facts' matter; and autobiography is taught in ways that encourage reading the author's life as unique, separate from the reader's and important mainly for understanding the author's individual struggles and accomplishments. Is it any wonder, then, that students have not learned to read a text as a *model*: to see the process of the author in the production of the text? Students have, instead, been taught that their role is to 'get' the content: memorize it, reproduce it" (ibid:67-68).

Another obstacle that stands in the way of productive appropriation of Collective Memory-Work in university seminars is the (covert) consent of students to their position as "subject-of-paternalism" (Ellsworth 1993, quoted in Heald 2004:68). Susan Heald suggests that "feminist professors who refuse the mantle of authority granted to them by performing the Expert are difficult for students to place in the subject position of 'professor'" (ibid.). This is the same pattern that came up in the discussion of the deputy managers in the pre-schools when they spoke about personnel management. It rests on materially acting out unwritten normative expectations connected to a particular status assigned to oneself and the other/s. Included in it is the interlacing of perspectives in the sense of an anticipated obedience that similarly leads to both reaffirmation and reproduction of these very norms that are expected to be part of the expectations of others. For a lecturer at third level to conform to these expected expectations requires to pick the "right topics" and use the "right methods." It also has a sheer physical dimension in the way the "mantle of authority" is displayed in everyday encounters. In a detailed study of body practices in schools Antje Langer has described what makes the body of a



teacher into a *teaching body*. Dress, body posture, gait, gestures, facial expression, position in a room, etc. are all essential for gaining legitimacy as a teacher in the eyes of the students. As such the teaching body is constructed as a means within a specific interaction arrangement (Langer 2008:184). This is not different in universities.

Hierarchies based on institutional status are inherently part of the specific interaction arrangement. Teachers who use Collective Memory-Work in their courses are still separated from their students by institutional status. They have however made a conscious decision to enter into a co-constructive process together with the students that challenges the traditional status assignment via formal roles. Students who rely on such traditional role scripts and do not find them in the concrete interaction patterns, i.e. if they cannot recognize the Expert any more because she has taken off the mantle of authority, often react with irritation and resistance. They in fact may try hard to claim back these traditional hierarchical patterns. (Not only) in seminars with Collective Memory-Work this can lead to unproductive skirmishes and guerrilla tactics that undermine a sensible engagement with the respective topic. Struggles over expected (normative) role scripts can in themselves be a valuable learning experience. From the perspective of the teachers who wish to abandon their position up-high it is more a tiring drag where they would much prefer to work together with students along a shared topical interest.

In universities that are understood by students as simple relay stations on the pathway to a job (ideally well paid), with lecturers who share exactly this understanding, with curricula which both assume and serve such an understanding, Collective Memory-Work is a challenge to the system. Where teaching in third level institutions is equated with "lecturing" and learning is equated with "getting it," students easily develop a "kind of 'Just the facts, ma'am' attitude . . . . [They] are less interested in the exploration of themselves or others; they want to know what's on the exam, or at least to have knowledge compartmentalized, coming in pieces which can be wrapped up, packaged and remain external to them. They want the kind of service promised by the big corporations: fast, uniform, no surprises" (Heald 2004:78). That is not possible with Collective Memory-Work.

These types of friction constitute a potential for conflict in all environments where learning is subjected to a context of assessment and examination. If the interest in exchange-value dominates, the offer or the request for an orientation along lines of use-value will meet resistance. That students

adopt a perspective of exchange-value is neither surprising nor is it a personal failure. It rather is a strategic orientation along the perceived reality of social circumstances in which such an orientation is indeed by times required from everyone who sells their labor power. It is a survival strategy. As a blind reflex that prevails in all areas of life however it cuts off possibilities of making allies across boundaries of social division, thereby re-enforcing these very boundaries. Effectively it then becomes a chain put on ourselves. The double feature of on the one hand keeping the strategy as an option, and on the other hand not reverting to blind reflexes can be difficult. It is urgently required.

All aspects touched on in this section point to the importance of gaining as much clarity as possible about the (institutional) context in which Collective Memory-Work is supposed to be used, and make conscious the different fields of tension that exist between method and learning environment.

## 7 GET STARTED

Email Maggie to Tina

*Hi Tina, we can meet Saturday at 11. John got the room in the union headquarters again. See you then, M.*

Saturday

Maggie: How long do we have today?

John: We can go until afternoon. Hanna is at basketball. The room is free all day also.

Tina: I have no other plans either.

Maggie: No time pressure, that's good.

Tina: I brought a small check-list what we have to get sorted. Should we go through it?

John: Good idea.

Tina: Time and place were agreed already per email. We can meet once a month on a Saturday and John said we can always use the room here. Next would be, who to take part? I guess we won't be only three.

Maggie: After reading a good bit I have to say, there were a couple of projects where Collective Memory-Work was done by only two people, or even one person on their own.

John: And what should be collective about that?

Maggie: Those people don't refer to the collective any more, they simply talk of memory-work. But leaving aside the label that is stuck on, it doesn't have to be bad just because it isn't done in a group.

Tina: I would prefer a group. Five, six, seven would be good. It can always happen that someone is not available for a meeting. And anyway, it is a lot more fun with a few more people.

Maggie: It also makes life easier to share tasks, say, if we write up minutes or if we want to review literature.

John: OK., we are all on the same wavelength with that one. And maybe we can find another one or two men to join us.

Tina: Should we try to clarify what our learning environment is like? It is surely good to know that we are not operating within a traditional setting.

Maggie: No university, no further education college, no continuing professional development, no in-job-training.

Tina: No registration, no fees.

Maggie: No certificate of participation, no exams.

John: And no compulsory attendance, just like the steering groups for social change. They all went bust.

Maggie: Why is that?

John: Because the people who set them up locally were burned out fast enough. There was too little reliability, too little commitment, too little identification.

Tina: That could be a problem for us too.

John: That's why we should only start properly once we are enough to cope with the one or the other drop-out.

Tina: Agreed. Will we move on?

Maggie: Wait a second. This is a demand also put on ourselves. We need to make sure that we concentrate on the essentials and that we don't stress each other out. A bit of relaxing from time to time seems important to me.

Tina: We don't have any time pressure from outside. We shouldn't put ourselves under pressure from inside either. Fixed dates are always an advantage.

John: I agree, it would be impossible otherwise.

Maggie: OK., what's next?

Tina: Shifting the topic. I took a note on this because I found the information about the Swedish women fascinating.

John: Are you talking about this thing with displacement, transfer, dislocation? Maggie had sent it to me also. Isn't that splitting hairs? What is it good for, another term and another term?

Tina: But they do explain it. You can transfer a topic from the abstract into the concrete by aiming at examples of experience that fit the abstract term. And you can search in the stories for connections that you previously didn't think of, and then formulate a dislocating trigger that brings you away from the abstract concept. I would like to try that.

Maggie: That would mean that from the outset we aim at two rounds of writing memory-scenes. Does that bring us a problem with time?

John: Do you remember the calculation in the train? One scene, one meeting. Even if we are only five, five scenes, five meetings. Then there is the introductory phase. And afterwards the whole thing again? A year won't be enough with our monthly meetings.

Tina: We would have to try it. Let us say we are five, that doesn't mean that all five texts need to be analyzed. There may be topical overlaps. Maybe we find a new writing trigger already after two or three texts. And if not, no big deal, then we continue as long as we have fun with it.

John: Sounds a bit like, the trip is the destination.

Tina: I would call it self-confidence in applying the method, appropriation. We simply do, what suits best for us.

Maggie: I like that approach.

Tina: Literature review. Should we do that?

Maggie: Definitely yes, it is part of it.

John: We can share it, not everyone has to read everything. And it doesn't need to be a fully fledged written summary or presentation. Simply tell the others what is important in what we read.

Tina: OK., we put it on the list. Once we have our topic we suss out what sort of interesting stuff we find.

Maggie: What do you think of acting out some scenes?

John: I have no interest in psychodrama.

Maggie: I didn't say psychodrama. Of course we are not starting group therapy here.

Tina: I would want to work with the texts first, see what comes out of it and how we get on with each other. I would always focus on detecting self-constructions in our societalization.

Maggie: I was simply thinking of having a bit of fun. Many of the stories that you find in literature on Collective Memory-Work are pretty good templates to play and to do all sorts of alienation effects with them. I think that might be enjoyable, particularly if it is the own scene that is played out, exaggerated and spiked with new ideas.

Tina: No didactics intended?

Maggie: No way.

Tina: How about we keep it in mind as a possibility and we decide when we're there? Maybe we get the right kick when we have written the scenes.

Maggie: Written and analyzed, that's what I mean. There is no point to play them otherwise. We want to raise the dust that has settled in them.

John: I am most curious whether the disappropriation works for me.

Tina: You mean, can you hand over your text trustingly for further treatment? There may be something about that. Who knows what sort of pet-chains and self-constraints we will work into our stories. I would imagine that can easily lead to a defense reflex once they are shown to us.

Maggie: Defending competence in non-competence.<sup>23</sup> We love to hold on to our naivety. Seen from this side, maybe you declutter my naivety-box by kicking out some well groomed certainties. There is a bit of adventure in it.

Tina: Do you remember the stylish stories of the artists?

John: That won't be a problem for me. I think it is more a challenge to write a text that does not always deliver the solution already.

Maggie: I need to break free from the format of report writing. That's what I do day-in day-out.

Tina: I write a lot of proposals, templates, guidelines and so on. I hope that won't get in my way.

John: Should we try to find a topic?

Tina: We need something that affects us all. Best if it is something currently on our minds, maybe even a bit unsettling, simply a problem.

Maggie: But we need to be careful, experiences differ between the sexes. It should be something that suits a mixed group. For instance, what I am struggling with are the expectations of expectations in my job.

John: Your daily grind as a school inspector?

Maggie: Everyone expects that everyone expects that everything is done as it is done if everyone does it as everyone expects that everyone expects it.

Tina: And does everyone do what everyone expects everyone to expect?

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23 Maggie's long-term friendship with numerous feminists led to her from time to time reverting to sources that she isn't actually aware of any more. This here is from the second volume of *Frauenformen* (Haug et al. 1987:129).

Maggie: For goodness sake, yes! That exactly is the problem. And I am in the middle of it all.

Tina: But your job is picture perfect made for it. In our seminar house we also have our well trodden ways, but surely not as bad as in the Department of Education.

John: It doesn't have to be the job. Recently I was at a union gathering. There were people at it from the national coordination committee. Normally we meet here in these rooms. But this time we went to the best hotel in town. Afterwards I asked the guy who had organized the meeting, why? He told me there would have been no suitable rooms here in the building. Such nonsense. For him it was all about impression, service and catering included.

Tina: That's the same with us. The chairperson of the board of trustees appears and bingo, the silver plates are on the table. And why? Our manager says, it has to be like that and that is all that's to it. Expectations of expectations. And once the fellow shows up he most likely also expects of us that we think he feels particularly well if we make a big fuzz about his presence. At the core he may prefer a bag of chips from the chipper across the road.

Maggie: All well and good, but these are things you observe about others. We need something that concerns ourselves. For me, I am struggling with expectations of expectations all the time.

Tina: I am sitting at the table when the banquet starts. And I politely keep my mouth shut. At most I take a glass of water instead of champagne. But no-one even notices it. At any rate there are frequently situations where I do something just because I think someone expects it from me.

John: For two years I was part of the board of management of the basketball club. During the first year I even went to the Christmas party because I didn't want to disappoint the others. Hanna laughed herself to pieces. She said, that is all in my head and that I should not get my knickers in a twist, nobody would care.

Maggie: Maybe then it isn't such a bad topic.

Tina: And it is important in the reproduction of social circumstances.

Maggie: True, as long as everyone functions everything functions. There is a lot in it, norms, rules, authority, loyalty, conformism.

John: Consent, participation.

Tina: Tactics, strategies. I have already a few bits of literature in mind that would be well suited.

John: Does that mean we have a topic?

Tina: That was rather painless, expectations of expectations, yes. Now we need a few people to join us.

Maggie: Best we try by word of mouth. I am going to ask a couple of friends and colleagues.

John: What about the union's email list?

Tina: Sounds good. Title: Expectations of expectations. Two paragraphs about the topic, two about the method, contact address and phone number. Then we'll see what comes back.

John: I'll do that. And I will also ask a few people directly.

Tina: Perfect. Let us stay in touch, and we'll meet again in four weeks time.



## 8 COLLECTIVE MEMORY-WORK IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING

While Maggie, John and Tina are on their way I am going to present some examples of applications of Collective Memory-Work in university teaching that were developed by lecturers in different locations and disciplines.

### 8.1 FEMINIST MEDIA STUDIES

At the Department of Communication at Vienna University Johanna Dorer has offered a methods course on feminist media studies in which she introduced Collective Memory-Work. The following section is based on personal communication with Johanna Dorer (email August 8 – September 19, 2018).

The course concept is laid out for a seminar that runs over one semester. There are 30 – 35 students enrolled. The course consists of seven units of three hours duration. The interval between two units is 2 weeks.

In the first unit Johanna Dorer gives a brief introduction into Collective Memory-Work and the topical scope of the course is defined. The students receive a list with publications on qualitative research, Frigga Haug's introductory lectures on Collective Memory-Work (1999a), a couple of volumes of *Frauenformen* and also some essays that were generated in earlier years in the course (Dorer 2000, 2008).

For the second unit the students are required to:

- review literature on Collective Memory-Work and write a short summary (2 pages) about the method,
- write a memory-scene on a trigger topic that was decided in the first unit.

This trigger is derived from a discussion between the students and the lecturer. Johanna Dorer reserves the right to formulate the trigger topic so as to make sure it fits in with both method and course content (feminist media studies). Some examples: when s/he was in the internet for the first time; s/he watches Taxi Orange<sup>24</sup>; s/he watches sport; s/he today on

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24 Austrian TV-program

Facebook; a time when s/he was absorbed with a European topic; s/he watches commercials.

Prior to the second unit the students send their memory-scenes to the lecturer per email. Guidelines for writing relate to length (one page A-4 max.), formatting (12pt font, 1.5 line spacing), perspective (write in third person singular, no "I-stories," a recount of an event), and anonymity (no name for the main character, simply use pronouns). Anonymity is of particular concern for Johanna Dorer as the course is designed as a seminar on research methods, not as a means of consciousness-raising or tackling psychological issues.

The second unit is split in two 90 minute slots. The first of these slots is used to introduce the text-analytical approach. Johanna Dorer uses excerpts from the *Frauenformen* publication on film experiences of women (Haug and Hipfl 1995), and a selection of key issues derived from texts by Frigga Haug (1990), and Karen Haubenreisser and Maike Stöckmann (1993). The second slot on this day is used to do a first text-analysis in groups of four to six students. For this purpose Johanna Dorer has compiled a collection of the memory-scenes that the students had sent to her. The texts are numbered, authors are not named.

For the following four course units the students work together in small groups. Each of these groups is physically present on two of the course days (i.e. a maximum of 15 – 18 students in total per course day). Each group analyses a total of four memory-scenes (two on each of the course days). While the students work on their text-analysis Johanna Dorer goes from group to group and supports with advice on any problem that comes up in a group. The small groups pick the memory-scenes for analysis from the collection as they wish. If the author of a particular text is part of a group s/he can push for another text to be chosen without having to reveal her/his authorship. Anonymity of authors is mandatory in the seminar.

In doing the text-analysis the students can use a template with questions to be asked of the text. This template resembles the aspects that were presented in chapter 4 under the term "deconstruction." Added to it there are questions specifically aiming at gender constructions in the texts. The small groups write up results in a summary of their text-analyses. For this purpose Johanna Dorer provides a list of categories that can be addressed in their summaries. E.g., in a course where the topic of media presentation of a major soccer event was chosen, categories included aspects like: interest for soccer, insider knowledge, importance of media, gender stereotypes

(reproduced or interrupted). All of these were always to be related to gender constructions in the texts.

For the last course day the entire group of 30 – 35 students comes together for a joint appraisal of the small group results. It can happen that two small groups independently choose to work with the same memory-scene. This offers a chance to compare their results. Following the last course day the students have another four weeks to produce a final research report on the results of the small group work. These reports can be produced individually (four to five pages), or as well as a collective production of a team (length extended accordingly).

In Johanna Dorer's seminar elements aiming at learning about oneself are minimized. The orientation lies on the topic, not on self-development. In her opinion the learning effects for students are mostly a raised awareness how language creates reality and how gender stereotypes are reproduced in it. From the teacher's perspective she observes that many participants have difficulties with analyzing language due to lack of basic knowledge. They find it hard to distinguish words for their respective categories and to depict central propositions of a given text.

A strength of the use of Collective Memory-Work in the course seems to be an increased ability on the side of students to work with language, but also a better understanding of processes of "doing gender" with a possibility for a transfer of the theoretical insights to a personal level. This is not in contradiction to the orientation of the seminar. It is an effect that is generated irrespective of the focus being on the method as an instrument for social scientific research.

There are problem areas that Johanna Dorer identifies for the course concept in the given institutional context. The group of 30+ is too big (hence the split for the middle part of the seminar). But this number is non-negotiable, it is an institutional requirement.

Another obstacle is a lack of motivation in some students. Some students simply need another methods seminar in their portfolio and they enroll because the course dates suit them, but they don't have an interest in the method nor in feminist media studies.

Time is too short to combine Collective Memory-Work with other methods and have an in-depth discussion about methods and methodologies. Time can also be an issue when it comes to getting a grip on the text-analysis. Some students need to do it three or four times before they understand what is required.

The course is tightly planned and conducted. The students are supported constantly in form of guidelines, lecturer's advice, feedback and reflection, but also by the setting of clear tasks. In all of that Johanna Dorer's adaptation is modeled quite closely along the original projects of *Frauenformen*. In her memory of her own participation in the course Doris Allhutter describes the course as a "textbook version" of Collective Memory-Work (personal communication May 4, 2018).

## 8.2 TEACHER EDUCATION I

Judith Kaufman started using Collective Memory 1998 in a course in teacher education. It ran over 15 weeks for three hours per week. Topics in the seminar concerned child development, culture, school and community (Kaufman 2008).

At the beginning of the course, after a brief introduction to the methodology, the students wrote a memory-scene on a trigger word (originally gym, in later years also, e.g. recess, tests, lunch). These texts were the basis for discussions for the first four weeks. The discussions were of a rather general character, there was not yet a specific template or set of questions provided for working with the texts.

The second phase of the course stretched over six weeks. During this time students reviewed literature that Judith Kaufman selected for the course.

In the last third of the course the students came back for another four weeks to the initially written memory-scenes. Now they analyzed them with the theoretical references in mind from the literature study that took place in the meantime. "By the time we got to the end of the semester, I felt like they 'got it.' They could appreciate the significance of their memories and analysis as ways to reflect on their socialization as it related to learning and teaching" (Judith Kaufman, personal communication September 7, 2020).

In later years she adapted the syllabus also for a course on "Multicultural Perspectives on Early Childhood and Childhood Development." "I limited the readings on memory-work and gave them time in class to work on their memories and analysis. For our first meeting, I had them read my chapter on the work with my undergrads in *Dissecting the Mundane* and asked the students to write their earliest memories of school (no specific topic) using the steps outlined in the chapter. The following week in class, they got into

small groups and considered clichés, generalizations, and what was missing from the memories. They also started to think about connections between the memories – though this was difficult because their memories were quite diverse in age and focus. I asked them to do some work over the next few weeks focused on collecting popular culture perspectives on learning and teaching by looking at TV, film, writing, social media, etc. The small groups had to produce a draft analysis at about the midterm and a final analysis of their memories at the end of the semester" (ibid.).

Looking back on this seminar Judith Kaufman concludes that it would have been better if all memory-scenes had been written on the same trigger word. To ask simply for the earliest memory of school brought up scenes that spread over a wide range of topics. Accordingly it took the small groups quite a time to define their topical focus.

She finds that some of the students produced very good analyses. One of the groups concentrated on the white spots in the texts. That brought them into a discussion about the lack of diversity in classes and also in the curriculum. Another group decided to write a second version of the memory-scenes which helped them to see how the stories are artistically constructed in a way to make them fit with the self-image of the authors. This group also discussed the practices in school as depicted in the stories and developed a critique of the restrictions imposed in schools on collaboration and mutual help.

A deeper utilization of the potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning however was only possible for one of the groups. "My sense is that only one of the groups experienced memory-work as a tool that could be helpful in understanding and interrupting their thinking about school and themselves as teachers" (ibid.).

Her reflection on this course led Judith Kaufman to modify the course concept again. In another seminar on "Research with young children" she provided the trigger for all students' writing of a memory-scene (here: test). "In thinking back over the two courses, using a specific cue in the second course helped the students in discussing the memories as a whole. Too many differences and not enough similarities stymied the first class. The second class also had the benefit of 4 students who had taken the first class with me. I think the analyses from the second class were stronger as a result. I think a few of the students were strongly impacted by memory-work and this may be a 'good enough' result in classes where I struggled with giving my students enough experience with memory-work in order to

help them become sharper critics of human development and assessment as they relate to schooling" (ibid.).

### 8.3 TEACHER EDUCATION II

The longest practice in using Collective Memory-Work in university teaching has Kerstin Witt-Löw. Together with Marion Breiter she has used the method since 1989 in the Department of Education at Vienna University. Originally they offered courses on women's studies covering topics like mother images, psycho-sexual socialization, fear of success. "The course was very popular with students. In 2001 we received an award for innovative teaching from Vienna University for our course concept. Nevertheless with the focus on women's studies we remained at the margins in the Department of Education. Our course was an elective subject. As external lecturers we were not integrated in the Department. For years we held our course in the rooms of a women's advice center outside of the university. Ten years ago we moved to the Center for Teacher Education at Vienna University, being invited by Ilse Schrittmesser, professor of school research and teacher education who had participated in one of my seminars in professional teacher training where we used Collective Memory-Work to analyze school experiences.

Today the course 'Collective Memory-Work on Learning in School' is part of the curriculum of teacher training. In recent years it was grouped into various topical sections such as 'educational professionalism,' 'educating and counseling' or 'research methods.' Our approach remained the same throughout: starting with their own 'school stories' the students delve into an educational topic. The aim is for the students to increase their capacity to act as future teachers and work out the possibilities to act within the institutional space of school. By now my colleague Marion Breiter is retired and I am teaching the course on my own" (Witt-Löw 2020:360).

Normally the course caters for 25 students. It starts with a two-hour introductory session in which information is presented on organizational and time requirements, an initial overview of the application of Collective Memory-Work given, and a basic view on the course topic provided.

The course then entails two weekend-seminars. The first one is scheduled shortly after the introductory session, the second one takes place at the end

of the semester. In the time between the two weekend-seminars students work in self-organized small groups. During this phase they also attend one (or two) supervision sessions with Kerstin Witt-Löw.

The first weekend-seminar consists of:

*Saturday (six hours)*

- interactive games for group building and developing constructive and lively working atmosphere
- collecting prior knowledge and ideas of students on the question "What makes a good teacher?"
- introducing the concept of "good enough teacher" by Kerstin Witt-Löw (adapted from Winnicott's ideas of the good enough mother)
- presentation on historical development and theoretical foundation of Collective Memory-Work by Kerstin Witt-Löw
- practical exercise of text-analysis with a model story
- forming small groups who will stay together for the semester and work with their self-generated memory-scenes
- in small groups: define a trigger for writing of a memory-scene; these scenes are written by participants on Saturday evening for the next day

*Sunday (five hours)*

- in plenary: feedback on the process of writing memory-scenes
- discussion about teamwork and agreement on rules for collaborating in small groups (important: this is not a therapy group, the analysis is of texts not of persons)
- in small groups: initial reading and discussion of memory-scenes
- organizational agreements and creating a work plan in the small groups (e.g., who writes minutes of meetings, how is communication taking place, frequency of meetings)

Following the first weekend seminar the students work together in small groups on their memory-scenes and they engage deeper with the topic on

which they wrote their stories. Part of their task involves further theoretical discussion based on self-selected literature on their topic.

Approximately half way through the semester Kerstin Witt-Löw meets each small group for a one-hour supervision session. The groups present their intermediate results and discussions. Questions about working with the memory-scenes are addressed and if required the students get advice on further literature that might be relevant to their topic. There is also the option to agree on a date for a second supervision session.

In the second weekend-seminar at the end of the semester the small groups present their results to the plenary. Following these presentations the different topical strands are transferred into a concrete action problematic in a school setting. The students again build (new and differently composed) groups for discussing this action problematic with the aim to develop ideas how to deal with it in the concrete teaching practice in schools. The weekend seminar ends with a reflective feedback on process and content of the course.

Kerstin Witt-Löw identifies challenges and fields of tension in the application of Collective Memory-Work in her teaching. Students who come into the course know in advance that they are supposed to work in a group. But "there are always some students who are reluctant, waiting and overburdened with the task to actively look for a collective to join. The challenge in this situation is for me as facilitator, to make sure that these students don't feel left behind, and that collectives that have found each other already are open to re-constitute so that eventually all students find their place in one of the collectives. Sometimes this can lead to collectives having to deal with a diversity that the initial members did not envisage" (Witt-Löw 2020:370).

Another critical aspect concerns the institutionally mandatory assessment of the students' work. "Our course is part of the curriculum for prospective teachers. . . . For the students this includes the procedures of registration, the obligatory attendance and fulfilling of all tasks for the successful completion of the course. As lecturers we are obliged to set targets and provide a transparent marking scheme. At the end of the course these and other features are regularly evaluated by students in form of a standardized electronic survey. The results of this survey are examined centrally in the university. This system of marking and reciprocal assessment is contradictory to the openness of Collective Memory-Work, an openness that concerns both process and results. The assessment framework can



further create a field of tension within the collectives if the contributions of individual students to the shared work are seen as not equally balanced. In our course we give collective marks for the collective work, hence there is no distinction between individual contributions. On the other hand the overall success in their study program is measured individually. Some students need high marks for continued financial support through scholarships, an excellent result of the collective is particularly important to them. I reduce the dilemma of marking by limiting the marking range as long as all formal and topical requirements are met by the students" (ibid.).

## **8.4 ICT AND LEARNING IN ORGANIZATIONS<sup>25</sup>**

Collective Memory-Work is used in a six-week course on "ICT and learning in organizations" that is offered in Aalborg, Denmark by Mette Wichmand and Ditte Kolbaek. The course is included in a part-time masters program that is open to participants who have a first degree and also at least two years professional experience in their respective field of work. Many of the participants already hold a master's degree. They are often 30+ years old. Their professional backgrounds are found in many different fields, e.g. health sector, schooling, IT. These students are highly motivated, many of them work full time besides studying. Most learning activities take place online.

The course of Mette Wichmand and Ditte Kolbaek is scheduled as part of the third semester. At the end of the second semester the students already receive a short written introduction to Collective Memory-Work as a research method, and also the task to write a memory-scene (3rd person, no more than two pages). The writing trigger is set by the lecturers as "write about a personal experience where IT has been an enabler or obstacle for learning and knowledge sharing at your work." Students are informed that the memory-scenes are going to be shared with all participants in the course and that they will be used as empirical material in the course.

The course itself starts with a two-day workshop (Thursday afternoon to Saturday). The students send their memory-scenes per email to the

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25 This section is based on extensive exchange with Ditte Kolbaek (May 12, 2021)

lecturers in advance. Mette Wichmand and Ditte Kolbaek select two of the stories to be used in the workshop as examples for working with the scenes.

On the first day of the workshop the students work with these scenes, whereby they use Algirdas Julien Greimas' actant model (1973) to approach the texts analytically. They search the texts for relations between (acting) subject, the object (of desire) and the supporting or opposing forces (actors) in the situation depicted. The lecturers revert to this model because the students are already familiar with it from earlier courses. That allows to abstain from a time consuming introduction of other text-analytic approaches.

For their work with the text in the workshop the students have 90 minutes. This is done in a plenary situation with 20 – 25 students. During this phase the lecturers remain in the background. They take notes of contributions in the discussion, and put them onto a board for everyone to see. They also sort the contributions into topical clusters. This leads to a visualization of different ways to read and interpret the memory-scenes. The resulting overview shows the complexity of the remembered situation. The lecturers are not concerned with putting forward a (the) "correct" analysis of a text. The intention is instead to allow students to expand their perspective in understanding a situation.

The two-day workshop also comprises a couple of presentations (on theories of organizations and learning in organizations), a guest lecture and different phases of reflection among students without lecturer's presence. An important part of the workshop is the building of small groups of two to four students. After the workshop these groups are supposed to work for six weeks together to produce a joint essay.

Students organize themselves for and during this six-weeks period, normally by way of online<sup>26</sup> communication. The small groups also choose the topic for their essay freely. The only requirement for the topic is that it relates to a problem of organizational learning that involves information technology. A direct reference to the memory-scenes is not required. Nevertheless Mette Wichmand and Ditte Kolbaek observe that the chosen topics are often derived directly from the memory-scenes.

From the perspective of the lecturers the memory-scenes play an important role in the course. They often help students to see for the first

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26 Students enrolled in this course come from all over Denmark. Meetings in person are difficult to organise.

time that personal problems are essentially structural problems. This opens up possibilities to also see personal action as structurally anchored, an insight that is crucial for understanding organizational learning.

In many cases the students write about personal experiences which they had never before captured in words. The simple fact that others in the course describe similar experiences and are confronted with similar problems—even beyond boundaries of professional fields—has a relieving effect for the students. Suddenly something that was possibly interpreted as personal failure in a critical incident is re-interpreted and understood as an organizational problem.

Also, the memory-scenes allow to make a connection between the own practical experiences and the theories that are presented in the course. "As an example, students were introduced to the Japanese researcher Nonaka's . . . theoretical understanding of technologies as not only 'tools' but as 'spaces' that we work and collaborate in. Asking students to analyze their CMW stories using Nonaka's theory encourages them to think of the technologies present in their stories as spaces that create openings and barriers for interaction and co-creation of knowledge. When the students analyze several stories by means of a theory, as illustrated above, their understanding of their stories as well as the theory changes. In the interplay between stories and theory, students get the chance to experience the theory as a pair of glasses that makes it possible to look at a familiar reality in a new way; for example, it becomes possible to see technology as a 'social space.' The theory can also become less abstract and more related to practice as the theoretical concepts are applied to the students' work-life experiences. Furthermore, bringing the stories and theories together also allows students to see the limitations of the theory, such as when it seems more relevant to understand the technology in the story as something other than a 'social space,' and other theoretical concepts of technology are brought into play. Last but not least, the interplay between stories and theory sharpens the students' eye for the possible collective questions worth discussing, examining, and researching both from practical and theoretical perspectives" (Wichmand and Kolbaek 2021:no page number).

## 8.5 TEACHER EDUCATION III

The next example is from Toronto, Canada and it brings us back to teacher education once more. Naomi Norquay has worked with students who after obtaining their diplomas will teach in a context that is "increasingly multi-racial and multi-ethnic and home to recent immigrants and refugees." She holds that "[one] of our mandates in the teacher education program . . . is to prepare our students to teach in these two contexts: in schools with immigrant and refugee populations and in the wider social environment that is often rife with racist understanding and approaches to those populations" (Norquay 2008:151-52). This provides the background for the topical focus in the course.

The only ethnic group in Canada without an immigration history are the members of the First Nation Communities. Immigration to Canada was politically regulated quite differently at different times. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century immigrants came predominantly from Britain and France. Between 1929 and 1945 immigration to Canada was as good as impossible, between 1952 and 1966 workers particularly from Italy and Greece were encouraged to come to Canada and from the mid 1970s onward Canada opened its doors to refugees also (ibid:155-56).

As the different government policies over time are traceable in the family histories students are asked at the beginning of the course to write down their own personal family history. Instead of memory-scenes of a particular situation these family histories provide the empirical material in the course. To support students in writing these histories Naomi Norquay gives a few questions that can lead their writing, e.g. "When did your family come to Canada? Country/region of origin? Who came? Age at time of immigration? Languages spoken? Education/occupation in country of origin? Reasons for emigrating? Who was left behind?" (ibid:170).

The students cannot answer all questions on the spot. There remain gaps to be filled. That triggers curiosity to know more about the own family. The material produced in this way offers an entry route for the students into an exchange about their individual family backgrounds. In these discussions students group together according to the different phases of government policies. That helps to illustrate the collective and social character of the family histories.

During the course the students then get the task to conduct an interview with a member of their family. The script for the interview consists of the same questions that the students initially used to write their family histories. Through the interviews they now try to fill in the gaps. The newly found information provides further material for discussion. The "[s]tudents interrogate their own stories and others' stories, supported by class discussions, lectures about immigration policies and practices, a film about the internment and subsequent deportation of Japanese-Canadians during and after World War Two, several first person accounts of immigration and immigrant identity, scholarly articles about immigrants and schooling" (ibid:170-171).

The students write a culminating paper (five to seven pages in length) at the end of the course. In this paper they are asked to address experiences within schooling, and questions of "authenticity (being a Canadian), entitlement (having a sense of belonging and cultural agency), and identity (national, cultural, ethnic, etc.)" (Ibid:171).

It is obvious how this course concept differs from the procedures in the original Collective Memory-Work model. On the other hand it shares important orientations. The intense engagement with the (individual and collective) immigration histories allows the students to develop an awareness of their own becoming in a socio-historical framework. An essential aspect is the detection of linguistic obfuscation, specifically in form of clichés that are used by the students in their own accounts when it comes to finding reasons for the emigration of their ancestors from their countries of origin and the immigration to Canada. In search "for a better life" they thought they "try their luck" where "the streets are paved with gold," are examples for such clichés. In this regard Naomi Norquay speaks of "myths of Canadian immigration" to which also the "rags to riches" saga belongs (ibid:161). At this point the direction of investigation in her seminar is geared towards detection of self-constructions that function as self-constraints.

In her reflection on the course and her experiences as lecturer Naomi Norquay also mentions the phenomenon of resistance. "Although I found that most students learned in transformative ways from this assignment, some students resisted the assignment and, instead, sedimented their subject positions and their views of the world. . . . Generally speaking, resistant students refused engagement with their family's stories, providing only summary comments instead. Many of these comments were akin to

the clichés of 'a better life' . . . Injustice, intolerance, inequities of any kind were not revealed, assumed or imagined. These students usually viewed their own identities and circumstances as solely the result of individual hard work or personal luck" (ibid:164).

She also reports that this type of resistance in some cases wears down as the year progresses, although she is clear that in the end it is on the side of the learner to decide what they (want to) learn. And in relation to her course concept she concludes, "[w]hen presented as a pedagogy, rather than a research methodology which people may choose or not choose to partake in, memory-work is not immune to resistance. An irony here is that resistance in one of the best justifications for employing memory-work as a pedagogy!" (ibid:165).

## **8.6 WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES**

Michele Byers was a member of the Collective Biography group in Halifax (see above, chapter 3) who worked and experimented with elements of image theater in their project. In a graduate methodologies course in women and gender studies that she taught she reserved two classes for an adapted application of Collective Biography. The group consisted of 13 students. In preparation for the unit students had agreed on a trigger topic. The students were initially asked to think of stories from their memory of "My first experience of feminism." During the first class they presented them in a story-telling round in class and at the end of that class wrote them down (Byers et al. 2014). The stories were read out in the second class, and "[a]fter each story, we took time to ask questions and prompt each other to remember more and move further into the particular memory at the heart of the story" (ibid:215).

For a fully fledged application of Collective Biography this would be an intermediate stage that leads to a revision of the memory stories. In Michele Byers' classes the revision was not possible due to the restricted time frame. But parallel to the classes throughout the entire semester the students wrote learning journals with weekly entries. "[T]hose journals provided wonderful insights into the ways in which [the students] understood and worked through this module. The students were also asked to respond to the stories . . . . The responses were done twice. That is, the students were

asked to reflect on their reaction to the stories when they were read in class for the first time. They were then asked to consider their reaction to the stories after reading them on their own, several months later" (ibid:215). It was this second reading that "gave the process a depth that wouldn't have otherwise been available" (ibid:221).

The example of this course points to some aspects that are important to consider in planning for adaptations of Collective Memory Work for purposes of third level teaching. A first observation relates to the topic that the students choose as trigger for their memories. Some of the group amended the trigger. Instead of their "first experience of feminism" they remembered the trigger as "what brought you to feminism?" In applications where the trigger consists of only one word (see above, e.g. Judith Kaufman) such a shift is hardly possible.

If some group members amend the trigger, it does not have to be a disadvantage for the group's discussions. It gives witness of facets of the topic that are meaningful for participants and for that reason should be noticed and considered when analyzing the stories and in the discussions of topical transfer.

In the context of Michele Byers course this aspect is also important for another reason. In their reflections on the course the students refer to feelings of exposure, vulnerability, anxiety and the fear of being "wrong," e.g. the story could be seen as badly written; the remembered situation could be found to be "not right"; the thoughts expressed could be dismissed as too trivial. This is a general phenomenon in relation to students' expectations of the standards they are supposed to meet in the assumed rigorously academic micro-cosmos of universities. It applies probably even more rigidly in politically charged courses, women and gender studies included. In class, self-images, expectations and expectations of expectations are constantly re-negotiated. Accordingly there can be a fear even in a seemingly harmless methods seminar of being seen as not sufficiently feminist, and in this case made even worse because material for showing oneself up is delivered in form of a personal memory story.

If students shift the writing trigger in a way as in Michele Byers' seminar, there can be effects on the dynamic in a group. "My first experience of feminism" does not presuppose a positioning of the author as affiliated to feminism, "What brought you to feminism?" does. In the context of a seminar in women and gender studies that can play a strategic role in the negotiations of status and power within the group. If such topical shifts

occur, they should be made transparent for all that goes with them, including observations of potential effects on the working relationships among participants.

In relation to learning results that are reported in the (self-)reflections of students in her course Michele Byers mentions that students realize that "[r]ather than forcing the path of memory to adhere to intellectual assumptions associated with right or wrong (what is the right answer to this question, what is the true memory), she has to trust that the memory into which she leaps will offer a productive—even if not immediately visible—connection to the question" (ibid:225). Another example is that of a student who starts asking herself questions about self-representation and representation of other (her family): "What if what I say weighs negatively on them or negatively reflects them? What if the meaning of respect is defined differently between what I believe and other generations of my family believe? How can I write on identity, which is defined by my community? What if the 'I' I am can only be defined through others?" (ibid:226). Results like these extend the scope of the chosen topic. They are unexpected and surprising, from the perspective of the teacher they are all the more valuable.

On the other hand the learning processes are not always smooth journeys. There can be resistance. Similar to Naomi Norquay's seminar this is also an issue in Michele Byers' classes. She quotes from a reflective journal of a student: "The most important lesson I learned this term came out of this activity. This lesson was that I was having an academic tantrum, so to speak. I define the academic tantrum as closing yourself off from learning new things. This is not the best approach to learning, I must admit now. By this realization of being open, I mean being able to see new ideas. I do not mean that you have to adopt every new theory or method you come across, but I do have to engage with new and challenging concepts in order to progress as an academic, especially as a feminist scholar" (ibid:225-6). Overcoming the resistance leads to even more profound learning results, not only for feminist scholars. Academics do not have a monopoly on learning led by reason.



## 8.7 BUSINESS STUDIES

At Vienna University of Economics and Business Anett Hermann offers a module on "Diversity in Teams." It is one of five modules under the heading of "Diversity Management," a series of elective courses in a bachelor degree program.

For the module she adapts Collective Memory-Work. Students are supposed to use a version thereof for a small research project together with a participatory observation in a field study. The description of the course content states: "This module aims at learning in groups from experiences of diversity and diversity management in teams, and the underpinning by theoretical knowledge. The focus lies on the connection of on the one hand acquisition of knowledge about processes of group dynamics, and on the other hand self-reflections on one's own minority status in different groups according to selected categories (or dimensions) of diversity" (Syllabus WU Vienna 2019/20).

There are a total of 60 students enrolled in the module, grouped into two plenary groups of 30 students each. 24 hours of classes during the semester are distributed over five dates of four or five hours each.

On the first day of the module Anett Hermann presents an introduction to the topic of "Diversity in Teams." She touches on a range of aspects, like e.g. characteristics of social groups, social categorizations, intersectionality in teams, dependencies and power relationships, diversity climate, team performance, team development. The students build small working groups (of five to six members). These small groups have the task to do a field observation between the first and the second day of the module. They choose a dimension of diversity (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, language, family status), and they organize a field study in an environment where they are in a minority position in relation to this dimension. Examples include, e.g. male students visiting a ballet class; students without physical impairment taking part in a wheel-chair basketball session; a group of students accompanying homeless people in Vienna. Immediately after the field observation the students write a memory-scene of their experiences in the situation. They bring these texts with them to the second day of the module.

This second day is scheduled three weeks after the first one. Here Anett Hermann introduces Collective Memory-Work as a method and she explains the text-analysis. The students are handed an overview of possible

questions to attend to in their discussion of the texts. These are akin to the criteria that were included in the model for deconstruction of memory-scenes above (see chapter 4). The small groups then work on analyzing the texts of the group members. Some of the groups remain in the seminar room, others use public spaces or break-out rooms. Anett Hermann goes from group to group and provides support and feedback wherever necessary. At the end of the second day the small groups are meant to be in a position to conduct a text-analysis on their own.

For the following six weeks the small groups organize their work process independently. Their task is to produce a presentation with preliminary results of their work on the dimension of diversity and minority experiences. The small groups give these presentations on day three and four of the module. They are further requested to write a final report on their field study in which they are to include references to literature from the field of diversity studies.

At the end of the module a written exam takes place on theoretical elements of diversity management and reflections on Collective Memory-Work. Students receive individualized marks for the module based on the group work and the exam.

Anett Hermann wishes to address three areas of learning in the module:

- The students should have the opportunity to get an awareness of the topic "Diversity in Teams" in the sense of learning from experience. They should find personal connections to the topic for understanding its relevance.
- The students should have the opportunity to transfer the impressions, descriptions and common sense theories gained from personal experiences into an intense discussion with scientific theories on diversity, teams and groups.
- The students should have the opportunity to approach planning and practical implementation of a research project. For many this exercise is the first practical application of a research method, developing a research question, data collection and data analysis. (Anett Hermann, personal communication October 1, 2018)

The learning environment in business studies differs from the one in gender studies, teacher education of feminist media studies. Anett Hermann says students normally don't have a link to women's studies, critical theory or the background of Collective Memory-Work. When they are introduced

to the history, development and rationale of the method many of them would consider it a "rather old-fashioned approach." All the more surprising is the feedback of students at the end of the module. Anett Hermann reports that there is no criticism of the method, instead she finds that "funny enough . . . they all say it was great" (ibid.).

A cooperation with Anett Hermann made it possible to conduct a series of interviews with participants in her course on their learning experiences. Results of this collection will be reported in the following chapter. Thus the perspective shifts from teaching to learning.

## **9 COLLECTIVE MEMORY WORK IN UNIVERSITY: LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

This chapter is based on a series of interviews with students in one of the plenary groups in Anett Hermann's module at the University of Economics and Business, Vienna. Of the thirty students enrolled in the plenary group thirteen took part in the interviews. These consisted of two separate conversations of a duration of 60 to 120 minutes. The first conversation was held at the beginning of the module (immediately after the introductory session). It was designed as an entry-interview in which the students spoke about their expectations of the course (and of themselves), their personal background and their connection to the course topic and content. The second one took place four to twelve weeks after the module ended. It was a feedback-interview with the purpose of finding out what experiences and learning results the students were reporting after the course concluded.

### **9.1 BUSINESS STUDIES:**

#### **COLLECTIVE MEMORY-WORK AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

The students who participated in the interview series came from three small working groups. These groups had chosen different fields for their field studies. The first group had booked a guided tour at "Dialogue in the Dark" (DD) including breakfast in the dark<sup>27</sup>. Another group went to a major gaming event (GE) where computer games were presented. The third one met members of the Austrian-Somalian Cultural Association (ASCA) in their rooms.

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27 'Dialogue in the Dark' is an exhibition where you can see nothing. Visitors are led through completely dark rooms by blind guides. In the rooms situations of everyday life are simulated, allowing the visitors to experience them from the position of blindness. One of the guided tours also includes a shared breakfast, similarly taking place in complete darkness (see: <https://imdunkeln.at/>).

The interviews allow for a recount of the schedules that the groups developed for themselves. In line with the course concept all participants wrote a short memory-text immediately after their field visit in which they described one (or more) situations encountered. They brought these texts as print-outs with them on the second day of the module. In their small groups they read those texts and marked in the print-out words and passages according to categories they chose from a list of possible criteria provided by Anett Hermann. All groups looked at self-constructions of the authors, the description of other persons in the stories, what (if any) emotions were depicted, and the perspective from which the stories were written ("I" or "We"). One of the groups also searched for links in the texts to minority-majority relations and for the use of gender neutral language, another group attended to contradictions and white spots.

All groups organized their further work with the texts in form of delegation. Each participant took on responsibility for producing a written analysis of one memory-scene. These analyses were supposed to be based on the students' notes from the second day of the module and the marked print-outs of the memory-texts. This step was done individually. The students put their written analyses up on an online-platform that could be accessed by the other group members. In this manner a collection of written analyses was compiled which then was put into the final project report. Compared to the analytic steps presented in chapter 4 what the students did covers the areas of deconstruction of the text, and reconstruction of characters.

Two of the three small groups organized a separate meeting in person besides the mandatory course days. In these separate meetings they discussed their presentations of interim results that were due to be delivered at day three or four of the module. The third group delegated the preparation of the presentation to two group members who designed a draft concept for it and circulated it per WhatsApp to the other group members. In this group no further discussion of the presentation took place. All presentations were held as intended on day three or day four of the module.

In all three groups the production of the final report on their project was done as a compilation of individually written parts. These parts were also collected on an online-platform that was accessible to the group members. In one of the groups one participant took on a role of editing and revising the document for purposes of coherence. In another group one student

added a separate part (hypothesis) to the report after the discussion that ensued in the plenary following the groups' presentation. These two groups organized their discussion of the final report as a communication via WhatsApp. The third group met once more in person prior to submitting their final report for a last check on correctness.

In the interviews I explicitly asked the students what in their opinion they had learned in the course. The answers can be summarized under a couple of key terms.

#### a) Teamwork, group experiences

All interview partners spoke about these issues. In nine of the thirteen conversations it was the first thought that they mentioned when asked what they had learned. The answers of the members of one of the three groups particularly stand out for their reports of what they experienced as extraordinary good cooperation. One of those participants noted: "Teamwork can actually work well", and another one: "Working in groups can actually work." From a third party perspective these are not remarkable insights. From the perspective of the students they are exceptional. Their experiences with group work are bad. In the entry-interviews many of the students voiced concerns in light of the prospect of having to work in groups. They feared problems of coordination, lack of motivation and freeloading from the side of others. The comments in the feedback interviews come as a result of no such experiences occurring during the group's work process. One of the participants speaks of a "show-piece work", another one of a "mega positive group experience". One of the members of this group however also notes that the relationships among group members remained on a rather surface level. Whereby he does not see this as a contradiction to the comments of the other participants. He also recalls the good cooperation and refers to it as a learning result. His remark points out that for the cooperation that is required here deeper (more intense personal) relationships among the group members are not necessary. In fact, in the institutional context of the tight schedule of the business studies courses they are a potential obstacle.

Feedback on team work and group experiences from the other two groups is also positive, albeit less enthusiastic. Here participants also recall difficulties during the work process (e.g. lacking reliability in use of online communication, lacking motivation on the side of some individuals, unequal

shares in delegated tasks). But all students unanimously report that any such difficulty could be sufficiently addressed in the group, and the results in form of the presentation and the final project report were very satisfying.

Nine of the thirteen interview partners draw theoretical conclusions from these experiences. Most often mentioned is the insight how important good communication is for a group to be able to work together, especially in terms of agreements about shared targets, clarity in delegation of tasks and tackling potential problems as early as possible.

In five interviews the students also relate to theory about phases of team development as introduced by Anett Hermann at the beginning of her module. They see it as new knowledge which they gained from the module.

#### b) The field studies

The field studies leave a lasting impression. Whenever the students talk about them they remember lots of details. In all interviews the participants rate them as important experiences. Both the fact that the groups went beyond the boundaries of the university into "real life" as well as the specific experiences in the respective events are highly valued by the students.

Learning results mentioned relate to:

DD – the sensuous experience of the (simulated) blindness; the resulting feeling of helplessness; other senses become more important but complete substitution is impossible.

GE – the gaming community as an inclusive field; gender and ethnicity are irrelevant; the event is organized barrier-free, thus allowing participation for disabled people; getting to know new computer games.

ASCA – awareness of social groups of whom the students had little knowledge beforehand; the obstacles to overcome for young refugees if they intend to study; information on organization and finance of the association; information on living conditions in Somalia and reasons for fleeing; many Somalians had "good jobs" there but in Vienna they cannot work in them; how strongly separated spaces for men and for women are in the association. (During their visit at the club's premises the group only met male members of the association. Questions about gender relations remained with the group after their visit.)

### c) Working with text/memory-scenes

Learning results in relation to the work with the memory-scenes relate to the writing and the analysis. In her description of the writing task in the module Anett Hermann suggests that students should write their stories on a gut level. Such a naive writing "without too much thinking," as one of the students describes it, is in fact a difficulty for some of them. Writing tasks in university often contain quite rigid requirements concerning style and format, it is possible to make a lot of mistakes (especially in assignments for marking purposes). However all students were able to write suitable memory-scenes. The learning result is that "I can do it", and it is not that difficult at all. One of the interview partners describes it as a great exercise to bring to paper simply what she had experienced.

Reading and comparing the memory-scenes of the different authors in a group brings an awareness of how different persons write differently. Thus an already existing common sense knowledge is made conscious in the course. Three participants explicitly name this as a learning result, whereby all three were members of the same small group. This is also the group that searched the texts for use of gender specific language.

Furthermore under this rubric there is the awareness that not only do different people write differently. They also have different perceptions of a given situation. These differences in perception become consciously known by way of discussing the memory-scenes. This is highlighted by two interview partners. Two others mention as a learning result the insight that texts can account for multiple readings and understanding, and that there is much more in a text if it is analyzed than what is gained by "simply reading" it.

### d) Self-reflection

One of the participants in the group DD concludes as a result of their project that pity and commiseration can be based on a projection. Another one says, the project brought her to see that she is not as progressive and reflective as she had thought herself. She came to this result when a perspective of pity was found in her memory-scene, a perspective that is ignorant of autonomy and capacities of blind people and gives witness of a lack of insight into alternative realities of life.

A member of the project ASCA develops a consciousness of the privileged position of EU-citizens when it comes to studying without paying fees, a



privilege denied Somali refugees. Another member of this group realizes how much she feels intimidated as a woman in a predominantly male environment, and she states that there is no reason for it. A third one gains an awareness of her own prejudices, here relating to dark-skinned men. She recalls the friendly reception that their group experienced in the meeting at ASCA and she concludes that it is better to first get to know a person before making any judgment. A fourth one speaks about her own (unclear) position in Austrian society. Her parents came to Austria from another country, she was born and grew up in Vienna. The meeting with the Somali refugees made her think of her own situation and led to a more reflective perspective. Instead of relying on reference to familial ancestry from outside of Austria she now realizes how much she herself has been socialized as "Austrian"—more than she had expected. In the interview she says she does not know any more what she "is" but it is not as black and white as before, albeit that she does not have an exact expression for it.

#### e) Minority/Majority and diversity theory

Minority/majority relations are an essential feature in Anett Hermann's module. There are learning results detectable from the interviews in this regard. All interview partners are aware of the fact that theories exist on dimensions of diversity. They also use terminology derived from such theories.

Four of the members of the project GE explicitly speak of the experience of group support in a situation where one is in a minority position as a learning result. To have others who are "on your side" gives reassurance and supports self-confidence. One of the four remarks that this is not a new insight, but the practical experience in the situation when the group consciously attended an event where they were in a minority position led to a sharper awareness of these effects.

Feedback by two participants in the ASCA project relates to insights concerning multiple levels of discrimination and theories of intersectionality. Two members of this group also report an understanding that minority can mean quite different things, and that there are minorities who are not oppressed. Another insight for one of the students in this group is how much people adjust their behavior in everyday life to conform with a felt (majority) social pressure.

One of the students in the module has gained a new perspective on the possibilities for a person to integrate in a given (social) environment. She realizes that being an extrovert person is not a passe-partout for integration. "If they laugh about you, you can be as extrovert as you want, it won't work."

One participant states the insight that in an analysis of minority experiences it is crucial to see the interwovenness of different levels, i.e. individual, group, organization. This perspective stands in a straight connection to elements of theories of organizations and groups that were part of the introductory presentations by Anett Hermann.

For one of the interview partners it was important to realize how diversity theory at its core is about power relationships. He gained an understanding that in the context of diversity minority is not to be seen through quantitative lenses, instead the pair of terms minority/majority expresses a power differential.

#### f) Miscellaneous

One member of the DD project describes as a learning result the insight that creative presentation formats can be successful in a university context. In their presentation in the plenary meeting this group had re-enacted the situation of breakfast in the dark. Everyone in the room was blindfolded and invited to enjoy a snack together. They also facilitated a plenary discussion in which they related back to their own experiences as contained in the memory-scenes. For the interview partner the learning result was that such a rather unconventional presentation was rewarded with full marks.

Two other students explicitly mention learning about new methods for research, primarily relating to the field study. Working with the memory-scenes for them is a form of documentation and reflection on the field study.

#### g) Transfer

Learning brings up new arrangements in thinking, feeling, acting with certain, more or less impactful consequences. The students refer to such new arrangements. They transfer what they have learned into (good) resolutions and wishes. Such conclusions drawn from their projects can be summarized in a couple of theses. These are in parts descriptive sentences, in parts they are straight forward recommendations for action. The

boundaries between them are blurred in everyday understandings (not only) of the students. A selection:

- One should not look at minorities from a majority perspective. Instead one should see their reality from their own perspective.
- In the professional field you should be conscious of the importance of meeting opinions and emotions of others with appreciation, and that the willingness to listen and speak to each other is crucial for effective teamwork.
- It is not enough to accept the other. If you don't work actively against it you support the power differential. "Living diversity" means to actively act against the power differential.
- Practicing diversity means making decisions irrespective of dimensions of diversity. The only valid criteria should be: tasks and their rational solution.
- Self-constructions of victim positions based on an assumed minority position can be (and are) exploited for political agendas.
- At the University of Economics and Business normally the task is to find a solution for a problem. In the course the outcome was "only knowledge," but that was good. Learning (and research) is a process that does not start with a solution. And not every process ends with a 100 % solution. Knowledge is also a result.
- Theory and practice can go hand in hand.<sup>28</sup>
- Diversity can contribute positively to teams and group work.
- Interactive formats and speaking off the cuff is a good way to approach a presentation, it can be recommended for replication by others.
- Groups of customers are diverse. It follows suit that companies are diverse. Diversity has an economic dimension, not so much an ethical one. It is simply logical that a company adapts to the customers.

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28 Generalization of the experience in the module that the theory presented at the beginning was seen to be relevant in the field study.

- We should try to integrate minorities better by finding a point of contact with them.
- We should show solidarity with people. People are differently well off. In some places you don't feel as happy as in others. Not everyone can choose where they want to be at a given moment. We should be conscious of that because in some situation we are in a stronger position and we should help the weaker ones not to drown.
- We should not treat a person as belonging to "a minority" or "a majority".
- For managing diversity in a company or an organization it is essential to understand the persons.

## 9.2 LEARNING EXPERIENCES: APPRAISAL I

The learning experiences reported by the students are based on the implementation of a thought-out course concept. In the institutionally structured learning environment learners are supposed to complete a workload of tasks set by a curriculum that is conveyed to them by teaching staff and is subject to grading. A first appraisal of the reported learning experiences takes the course concept as a point of reference. Does the course do what it is supposed to do? That means for students to have the opportunity to:

- get an awareness of the topic "Diversity in Teams" in the sense of learning from experience, and find personal connections to the topic for understanding its relevance;
- transfer the impressions, descriptions and common sense theories gained from personal experiences into an intense discussion with scientific theories on diversity, teams and groups;
- approach planning and practical implementation of a research project (for many this exercise is the first practical application of a research method, developing a research question, data collection and data analysis).

No doubt, that works. And it works in a way that students recall as extraordinarily good. Two areas stand out: the experiences of teamwork, and the field studies. The latter mark a break. They are unique, they interrupt institutional routines, they have a spatial and physical dimension. They lead students out of the university into the "real world," where "real life" happens. When the students speak about their field studies they remember lots of details. This is in notable contrast to them speaking about meetings of the project groups (Where was that again? What did we do?) or else of the meetings in the course setting. For students a class is just this, another class. They are at least in their third year, some even further advanced in their studies. They have walked through the corridors hundreds of times, stood in elevators to come from one to another floor, sat in (uncomfortable) benches in lecture halls, stared at more or less interesting power-point presentation, listened more or less attentively to lecturers, met in libraries or seminar rooms with small groups, always carrying with them their laptops and smartphones, always ready to take up this or that WhatsApp-, Facebook-, Twitter-, Instagram-message. How boring can it be? What of all of this remains in memory? Compared to this the visit at "Dialogue in the Dark," the gaming event or the Austrian-Somalian-Cultural-Association is a completely different dimension. No surprise that this leaves a far stronger impression. As an approach for a course concept that aims at experiential learning this is outstandingly well suited.

In the opinion of Anett Hermann the use of Collective Memory-Work in combination with the field study is scaled down a lot. But she thinks "it is quite productive if you speak about groups, and mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion, barriers and so on" (Anett Hermann, personal communication October 1, 2018). The memory-scenes are important because they focus attention in reflection on the field studies on the own experience of the students. Thus: not to think about the others (the blind, the gamers, the Somalians), but to think about yourself in relation to others. For most of the students this perspective is a novelty and as such it is a new insight already. Anett Hermann speaks of aha-moments as an effect of the module. "How to treat others? What does it mean to be in a minority position for once?" (ibid.)

The analytic work with the memory-scenes remains on a surface level. Some students see this: "The analysis was also intended to aim at ideologies, the opinions of the author. How are they contained in the stories? . . . Or, how does a person change during a conversation and how is

that reflected in the memory-scene. Are there processes of change in relation to thinking, patterns of thought? All that was not done with my text." As a reminder: The memory-stories were scanned by the small group during the second day of the module. Then each group member was supposed to write up an analysis of one story. Further discussion of the texts, or the written analyses did not take place in any of the groups. Compared to the processes aimed at in the concept of Collective Memory-Work this constitutes only a first step.

Would further steps be possible in the given institutional framework? As far as topics are concerned, surely yes. There are plenty of openings. The group that met with the Somalian refugees was made up of seven students. Four of them did not have an Austrian passport. The question of connections between nationality and identity as triggered by the project is clearly voiced by one of the participants: "What in fact am I? Am I Austrian? Am I not?" The category of nation as identity-marker is however not considered in the group's discussions. The fact that in the rooms of ASCA they met only men was still lively present in the memories of all students during the interviews. Similarly the difficulties reported by one of the Somalians in getting access to a place at the University of Economics and Business, and the fact that he has to pay fees for it (while the EU-students don't). These issues were also mentioned in the memory-scenes. They offer opportunities for discussions about social (institutional, religious) structures, self-positioning in and vis-à-vis these structures, and individual ways of working one's way into them. One participant in the GE project recalls in the memory-scene that the hall was full of advertising, another one mentions that tasks of supporting staff at the event were gendered with women at the desks and service while men worked in technical support and presentation. These are also openings for further analysis and discussion. The gaming event is praised by all members of the group as an inclusive event. They don't put this into a context of the commercial character of the event. The self-reflection of the members of the DD-group brings into view the perspective of pity and commiseration, but it remains on an individual level. It is not transferred into a discussion, e.g. of the history or the function of this perspective on a social level, or its connection to the imperative of performance as a yard stick or assessments in all areas of life.

All students bring with them into the module a topical interest. That is clear from the entry-interviews. But they also see the module as a course that should result in a good grade. For the small groups working together

the main criteria is efficiency, not insights. The learning efforts of the students are measured along the conditions in the specific learning environment. The presentation is seen as important.<sup>29</sup> To prepare for it there is not a lot of time. The tasks in the group are delegated. Results of analyses are forged together like an addition. For further cross-reference, putting observations and insights into a relation to each other, driving questions beyond the first level of answers there is no space or time made.

The theories presented in the course are also seen through functional lenses. As per course concept in their presentations and final reports the students should weave theories of diversity, team and group work together with the results of their engagement with the memory-scenes. At the end of the semester the students also sit an exam in which these theories are central. When asked whether there are theoretical insights from the course one interview partner said, on the spot she can't remember any. The theory "that we went through was only for the exam" and she finds learning for exams is of "medium efficacy" for long-term learning, hence she "cannot say anything about it at the moment."<sup>30</sup> This cute characterization brings out the point that lies at the heart of most students' priorities in the institutional learning environment. There are few individuals who enjoy engaging with theory. Those who do are the ones who take on the tasks of producing the respective parts in the groups' joint work pieces. They are also the ones who in their interviews have more to say about theories.

However there are two aspects of theory that remain after the course for more than just a few participants. The first one relates to Bruce Tuckman's (1965) developmental sequences in small groups, captured in the brief formula of "forming, storming, norming, performing" (later also "adjourning"). The combination of practically conducting their projects in the groups and theoretically explaining what is done (in terms of group development) allows the students a reflection of their own experiences and actions through the magnifying glass of theory. The benefits of such a

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29 According to Anett Hermann students in business studies permanently face demands for delivering 'good presentations'. The criteria on which a presentation is deemed to be 'good' are often questions of neat, spruced up appearance, matters of form dominate. Is power-point used well? Is the make-up too flashy? Is the tie fixed properly? How is the body language during presentation? etc. Against such a background it comes as little surprise if students relate to a good mark for an unorthodox presentation as a learning result.

30 This interview took place six weeks after the course ended.

learning experience is immediately evident and the students themselves are aware of it as is clear from respective references in the interviews.

The second lasting impression of theory can be found in the way the students speak about dimensions of diversity. It needs to be noted that the respective theoretical concept has been introduced in an earlier module already, therefore it is not entirely new to students. This may be a reason why the students do not explicitly refer to it as a learning result in the interviews. The fact that they use the terminology derived from this theoretical concept when they speak about their experiences in the module is however exactly this: a learning result. Every discipline has its own system of specific nomenclature. Adapting one's use of language to the jargon is part of the demands that students are exposed to (e.g. to achieve good results in exams). It is also an effect of the integration in a "community of practice" (Wenger 2008), even if this practice in the context of university is mostly talking (reading, writing) about practice that is going on outside of university.

### **9.3 LEARNING EXPERIENCES: APPRAISAL II**

In the framework of their studies for the students in this example the learning experiences are exceptional. The contribution of Collective Memory-Work in it should not be underestimated. For an impression of the potential as a method of learning it makes sense to also compare them to assessments of learning effects from other contexts. That shall be done next by referring to a number of key issues. If possibilities are depicted here that stretch beyond what was done by the project groups in Anett Hermann's seminar, this is not meant to devalue their work.

- Language

When thinking about the strengths of Collective Memory-Work in university seminars Johanna Dorer had pointed to the increased ability of students of working with language as a result of engaging with writing and analyzing the memory-scenes. Students in Anett Hermann's course also speak of insights into different writing styles. What does not feature in the interview is an understanding of language as a means of negotiating and constructing



meaning. Language as a means of politics that speaks as it were through us is not mentioned in the course. In the analysis of the texts in the groups differences in style are noted, it comes into view that sometimes emotions are mentioned and at other times they are not, texts are identified for the perspective from which they are written ("I" or "We"). But it remains out of the range of thought to discuss what this or that form of writing does for (or with) the reader, what constructions of meaning are offered by the authors and on what basis (common sense theories) these are worked into the texts. The level of "latent praxis connections" (Haug 2008:37) does not come into view.

- Using everyday experience as relevant material in research

Efforts of bringing everyday experience as relevant material into research stand at the very beginning of the development of Collective Memory-Work. For people to realize that this is actually possible and also valid is a reoccurring effect of practical applications. The students in Anett Hermann's course also made this experience. So far however they lack a forum for a meta-reflection on the character of scientific research (methodology), particularly in relation to the legitimacy of and reasoning for particular methods. Therefore it is not possible to come to a conclusion as to the effects that the experience has (and will have) on them. At any rate is is a result which will stay with them. Having seen in practice the relevance of personal experience for research and the abolition of the divide of subject and object in research is something to which they will always be able to refer back in the future.

- Questions can be answers

At the end of their projects certain questions remained with the students in Anett Hermann's course, but they do not identify them as insights. This has to do with definitions of success. Only one of the interview partners touches on this issue when he mentions that knowledge can be a result. Normally in their courses the orientation of the students is directed towards problem solving. They have not developed (or been taught) a culture of continued questioning, hence this is lacking in the project groups.

"Finding the right question is essentially only a result of the research processes, not its beginning" (Innsbrucker AutorInnenkollektiv 1986:79). "A research process draws on its self-produced infinity: answering 'old' questions brings up 'new' ones, leads onto new fields, other strands of investigation" (ibid:120). One of the major strengths of Collective Memory-

Work is exactly that it opens the chance to carry on finding new questions. Without questions no problem transfer can happen, and often the best questions are those that come up as a surprise. Memory-scenes offer a lot of surprises—if one is prepared to see them. For applications in teaching situations it may therefore be worthwhile pointing this out to students and lay out the respective routes for them accordingly. One possibility to highlight the importance of a culture of continued questioning could be the explicit task to include in a final report a section on new questions and on the trajectory of their development in the context of a project.

- Rendering the self-evident unfamiliar
- Losing naivety
- Productive uncertainty

These aspects arose in the context of the project of the deputy managers in pre-schools (see chapter 4). Looking at everyday practice through the investigative lenses of (self-)research brings into play a perspective that renders the self-evident unfamiliar. That happens also to a few students in the module on "Diversity in Teams." In some interviews it is possible to detect a productive uncertainty. Examples are mentioned above in the rubric on self-reflection.

Taking up the experiences with teams and group work in the module allows to further show how productive uncertainty could have been developed as a general feature for all students. But this does not happen and reasons therefore can be found in the concrete adaptation of Collective Memory-Work.<sup>31</sup> The course topic is diversity in teams. The practical project work is supported by theoretical excursus at the beginning of the module and in the feedback on the presentations. A particular focus in the course lies on making work processes in the group(s) transparent.

Already during the first day of the module there is an unusual amount of time available to the small groups to get organized among themselves. The second day of the module is almost completely devoted to concrete teamwork in the groups. The students learn by doing. The lecturer takes on a role of facilitator. She actively supports the groups and offers suggestions

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31 I use the example of the team and group work here because it was mentioned by all interview partners. Other topical openings that could have been driven further in search for productive uncertainty were mentioned above already.

for their work, e.g. the fact that all groups in their work with the memory-scenes attend to the author's perspective is a direct result of her advising the groups in line with the course topic and content. In their feedback interviews all students speak of their surprise (and satisfaction) that group work actually is pleasant and successful. And they have an explanation why that is the case. They find it in the course concept and the facilitation provided. Similarly they have explanations for other cases where it doesn't work: the chemistry isn't right; people aren't able for it; the group doesn't gel; there are freeloaders in the group; at the end it is down to each individual. And with all that theory dissolves into a nebulous "that is just how it is."

There were thirteen students taking part in the feedback interviews (out of 30 enrolled in this plenary group). It is highly unlikely that all thirteen are poster students who at all times in group tasks adhere to deadlines, always communicate reliably, get all work done to the best of their ability, etc. From the work with the memory-scenes there would easily be a way to bridge to questions of relationships between individual and group(s), group(s) and society at large, institutional context of groups, establishing of (internal) traditions, all of which would fit quite well with the overall course topic. Necessary for such a shift would be a conscious topical transfer as a result of the text-analysis. This however is practically impossible in the framework of timelines set for the different tasks (which in turn are a result of the obligatory marking of course work). Even if in a group there would be an interest in driving their questions into such a direction, using Collective Memory-Work to its full potential here stands in tension to the learning environment.

- Understanding research as inherently collectively
- Experiencing the group as anchor and driving force

"Something that I gained is definitely community, of doing, of thinking, and then also a shift in ways of thinking about research as inherently collective and of being more intentional about creating more horizontal research relationships." This general insight was mentioned by Erin Dyke as a learning experience from the project with the Hayward Collective (see above, chapter 3). The shift in ways of thinking about research as inherently collective relates to relationships between researcher and researched. It is in line with the feminist critique of traditional science. The aim is research

that is not done with a laboratory attitude looking from above on "those down there." Eradicating the divide between researcher and researched is essential for the concept of Collective Memory-Work. As a basic attitude it pervades Collective Memory-Work, it is a condition as well as a result.

The students in Anett Hermann's course don't ask questions about the character of research relationships. The entry-interviews make clear that they see their studies as a way into jobs (near exclusively) in the business sector. Studying is a necessary stage to go through on the way to a career. They don't see themselves as researchers, rather they are learners who learn what is to be learned. The frame of reference that they see as relevant for this learning is on the one hand the success in exams for acquiring the degree that functions as door opener. On the other hand it is knowledge that will be of practical use in their prospective jobs.

Of course it is always possible that for some of the students an academic career becomes a viable and attractive option. At the time of the interviews they are not at this point (yet). It is no accident that Anett Hermann points out that for many of the students the group work is the first research project that they engage in, and that for them an important part in the module is to gain an idea of what it means to "do" research.

Another dimension in Erin Dyke's comments concerns the experience of collectivity in doing and thinking. Equality based relationships are not yet a guarantee for collectivity. In the small groups everyone has equal rights from the outset. There is no formal hierarchy or status differentiation. This is a common experience for the students. In many seminars they are expected to work in groups, often on basis of a pure random group composition. Equality then is experienced as a problem because no-one in the group is *qua* status in a position to direct anyone to do anything specific. In consequence that leads to those who feel a stronger urge (need) to produce a result that gains them higher marks taking on more (and more difficult) tasks than others, simply to get it done. Hence workloads are not equal, and yet the benefits are reaped in by everyone. This leaves a sour taste in form of a resentment towards group work as such. In this regard group work within the institutional framework is in fact a means to foster a tendency towards individualization.

The positive feedback on the group work in Anett Hermann's module is a result of the experience that such difficulties either did not come up at all, or where they began to show they could be resolved quickly and in a satisfactory manner. One reason that this is possible in the projects is

certainly found in the transparency that is created by the interlacing of theory and practice. Another reason is that the group here is defined as a functional unit. The result is what matters. The way to achieve the result should be as smooth as possible. It works: all is well. The impression of a certain shallowness and superficiality of relationships in the group as mentioned by one of the students cannot come as a surprise.

This is not inevitable even in the context of university studies. An example of a project group in the course of Kerstin Witt-Löw (see above, chapter 8) in teacher training may be used to illustrate this. In a feedback interview with a participant in this course the student described how their group met outside of university in private settings for their work with the memory-scenes. These meetings took place at evening hours, lasted a couple of hours with participants sharing a meal and yet (or maybe just for that reason) engaging intensely with the memory-texts. As a result this student reports a strong coherence within the group. In the sense of learning experiences this goes into the same direction as Erin Dyke's notion of community of doing and thinking.

These observations further allow to emphasize the importance of set and setting, and the cross-referential impacts of outside influences (material, space, persons) and inner attitudes, moods, expectations, all of which are factors that play a role in the eventual materialization of learning experiences and learning results. For good reasons it is the interruption of university routines in the field study that remains most vividly in the mind. Erin Dyke's impression of community in doing and thinking is also closely linked to the weekend seminars which saw their group living and organizing together for the time being. For a group that works with a couple of memory-scenes in form of compiling individual analyses on an online-platform such dimensions are out of reach.

- Therapeutic effects

The misconception of seeing Collective Memory-Work as therapy has been touched on already. Nevertheless participants in projects by times report therapeutic effects. In face of such reports and the potential mix-up of the method with therapy it is noteworthy that no-one of the students in Anett Hermann's course drew on such connections. Obviously they don't come into their minds. In their community of practice therapy is not relevant.

Business is not about therapy.<sup>32</sup> What counts is what can be counted, success is based on efficiency and measurable (monetary) outputs.

There are different experiences made in other fields of study. Mia Liinason writes about a postgraduate course in gender studies in Sweden. 23 students participated in this course, it ran over two weeks, one of the course days was reserved for an adapted version of Collective Memory-Work. She reports that at "different stages during the day, the students returned to the comparison with therapy. Some were surprised that we wanted to work with this kind of method on an academic course. One student said: 'I have been to feminist therapy, and I liked it, but that was in a group outside of the academy.' Why did they return to this notion of therapy? And why was it difficult for the students to grasp the difference between a therapeutic method and this research method?" (Liinason 2009:81).

Mia Liinason believes "that the (mis)conceptions that occurred during our intensive program, where the memory work exercise was taken for a therapeutic session, reveals the deep embeddedness of the idea that experience-based work has a therapeutic function that can liberate us from oppression. But even though this might be valid for the way experiences were handled in the consciousness-raising sessions, this must not be true for all experience-based work. The resistance to the method ('This is not therapy!') was a complex resistance, however, as first of all it can be seen, by way of association, as a reconstruction of a connection between experience-based work and therapy" (ibid:84).

In drawing on the connection to therapy the students (re-)affirm a particular version of feminist history in which the equation of working with experiences and therapy as a way to liberation is self-evident. At the same time the students mobilized resistance against such an exercise in the framework of a university setting. "Through their referral of 'feminist therapy'/'experience-based work' to a space outside of the academy, the students expressed their expectations that academic feminism would work with theory (which was understood as different from experience-based work). Consequently, since it was conceived as a kind of work that 'belongs' to an arena outside of the academy, some of the students refused to take part in an exercise that worked with our own stories as the material" (Liinason 2009, 86). And Mia Liinason concludes that "situated in a larger discourse – politically, socially and geographically – where individuation and

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32 Although therapy can be business, and in fact quite often it is.

consciousness is proclaimed as *the* liberating strategy – the students in our intensive program had difficulties with the aim of memory work. Instead of giving them support in working towards a larger individual independence from experiences of oppression, from dominant structures and social pressure, we actually asked them to do the opposite – to investigate and understand the hegemonies at work, and their involvement in them" (ibid:87). From the perspective of students who position themselves within these discourses such a request is at best an impertinent demand, if not a proper insult.

What Mia Liinason's example can highlight is how the respective point of departure of participants in Collective Memory-Work projects plays a role in its successful implementation. But this point of departure is not chosen at random by participants. It reflects their personal social history as well as the learning environment in which they are embedded. A lecturer introducing Collective Memory-Work in a psychology course, or in a module in educational studies will encounter different expectations and reactions on the side of students. Both the level of discursive thinking<sup>33</sup> and the hegemonic orientation of the discourses in the respective fields differ. Consequently comparisons to therapy are drawn in gender studies, but not in business studies.

- Revealing self-constructions
- Detecting interwovenness of society and individual behavior
- Understanding oneself as living in man-made historical circumstances

These three (interlinked) aspects are closely connected to Collective Memory-Work from the earliest days of its development: as an aim in relation to the respective topics under investigation; and as a basic approach on which the method rests in general. It suffices to go back to some of the literature of *Frauenformen* to see how learning experiences grow from this.<sup>34</sup> The essence of such investigations lies in detecting the traces of societalization processes, sediments of (earlier) ways of working ourselves into social structures that still have an effect on our actions in everyday life.

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33 Term used in a conversation by Karen Haubenreisser (8. 5. 2011).

34 See, e.g. the chapter on "Marxism and Sexuality" in *Female Sexualization* (Haug et al. 1987:266-83)

One could speak of (psychological or cultural) imprints, but such a jargon does not adequately express the intended identification of interdependence of our own activity and structures of heteronomy.

In the original development of Collective Memory-Work it was important to make explicit the involvement of women in the processes of societalization. "In this sense, 'living historically' should be taken to mean a refusal to accept ourselves as 'pieces of nature,' given and unquestioned, and a determination to see ourselves as subject who have *become* what they are and who are therefore subject to change. In particular, we use the term 'living historically' to signal our desire to change our constricting conditions to make the world a more habitable place" (Haug et al. 1987:50-1). Self-changing here stands as a condition and a result inextricably connected to changing of circumstances.

Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber (1999) picked up the term of "living historically" in courses with teachers. They used photographs of first days at school, or class line-ups in "Picture Day Workshops." Participants exchanged memory-stories. They used the photos for an analysis of, e.g. the postures and positioning of children and teachers, and they thought about connections to their own (professional) biographies. In their book Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber refer to the exact quote from *Female Sexualization* as cited above (Mitchell and Weber 1999:73), but in doing so they only use the first part that relates to the subject's becoming and changing. The second part relating to the changing of constricting conditions is left out. The feedback of participants in such workshops as depicted in their book relate to self-perceptions (then and now), changes in roles (first student, then teacher), gender roles (in primary schools nearly all staff members are women), presentation of self (in pictures with artificial smiles), or also to effects of the photographs as anchor for family stories (ibid:88ff.). Such results will also ignite processes of self-reflection, but it is noteworthy that social circumstances do not play a role in the reported feedback.

The artificial poses in the pictures are seen, as are the gendered roles in schools or the unfulfilled dreams and ideals of earlier life phases. Without an increased perspective that includes questioning these phenomena (i.e. exactly *this* pose, *this* role definition, *this* dream and ideal) as based on particular (*these*) conditions and their historical development such reflections will only go half way. Based on such a half-way analysis, if the poses, the gender roles, the unfulfilled dreams and ideals incite unrest,



unease and a desire for change, what can these teachers do but look for individual solutions? And how far will that bring them?

The students in Anett Hermann's module also speak of insights and self-reflections, and they draw conclusions from the experiences in their projects. But a connection to social structures and their historical trajectories is missing here too. It is helpful, important and good to get rid of the perspective of pity. It would be better to also look at the history of such a perspective, its invocation and exploitation on a socio-historical level. It is helpful, important and good to resolve to integrate minorities, not to look at people from a majority-perspective, meet others' opinions and emotions with appreciation etc. It would be even better if the way of constructing minorities and majorities, the function and use of such constructions in the context of specific (contemporary) social circumstances against the background of establishment of exactly these circumstances was also made part of the reflection processes.

Detecting traces of societalization as explicit part of the methodological approach of Collective Memory-Work requires a conscious orientation in the work with the memory-scenes (or any other material as may be used). Where such a perspective is missing the learning experiences made possible in the respective projects will remain below the actual potential offered by the method.

- Thinking in contradiction
- Understanding contradiction as productive

Contradiction is a central feature for Collective Memory-Work. Against the tendency to blind out contradiction(s) in lived reality it aims at a process of detecting and highlighting them.<sup>35</sup> Together with the search for traces of societalization this also requires a specific perspective when working with the (written) material. The de-romanticizing, the loss of innocent naivety in relation to the topic at hand, shining a light on the (self-generated) white spots, all these are learning results.

But even without a focus on a particular topic, learning to apply such a perspective in itself is as much as possible as it is a desirable result of participating in a Collective Memory-Work project. Remember the

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35 The documentation of a seminar at Innsbruck University in volume 4 of the *Frauenformen* series can be read as exemplary. In this project the topic was 'Living contradiction' (Haug & Hauser 1986:77-121).

retrospective comments made by women who took part in *Frauenformen* studies at various times (see above chapter 2). An effect that was mentioned by Frauke Schwarting is the appropriation of a perspective that looks at phenomena in terms of contradiction, and the insight that development is something strenuous and only viable if one is not alone. And she says about the women who took part in their projects: "You also recognize them for their suspicion towards all too cozy thoughts and praxes, against the smooth and the unambiguous, against leaning back in the self-evident like in an armchair. With such a perspective you are never anywhere at home, but you are always on the right track!" (in: Haubenreisser & Gottwalz 2002:61).

In retrospective the teachers from Free Alternative Schools report about their getting wiser as to construction of their selves and their acts. They see a result of their project in gaining an understanding of the social contexts that impact on their impressions, insights and acts in a far more profound way than they had assumed. And they refer to a learning result when they speak about the ability to think in contradictions and recognize them as productive. (Lehrende aus Freien Alternativschulen, 2007:103; see above chapter 2).

None of the interviews with the students in Vienna contains statements that point into such directions. Even from the group that looks for contradiction and white spots in their memory-scenes there is no such feedback. Contradiction is not a category that is of relevance in the course when looking at the world and their own position in it. In this regard the potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning is not fully utilized.

## **10 COLLECTIVE MEMORY-WORK IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS OUTSIDE UNIVERSITY**

Universities are not the only learning environment in which adaptations of Collective Memory-Work have been used. Some examples from different other institutional contexts will be presented in this chapter. I will start with two applications in which the method was brought into secondary schools.

### **10.1 WRITING WORKSHOPS WITH 8TH GRADE STUDENTS**

Christopher Walsh reports about a project with inner city students in New York that aimed at interrupting and questioning gender stereotypes (Purohit and Walsh 2003; Walsh 2007). As an English-teacher he was dissatisfied with supposedly progressive curricular programs. He found them laden with presumptions that had little in common with the reality of an inner city school. They did not meet the interests of students who outside of school had to worry about food, accommodation and street gangs. They were not helpful in creating an understanding of the interrelatedness of language, forms of representation and human experience (Walsh 2007: no page number). He hoped to find a way to allow students to see such connections and the way discourses around race, class, gender, sexuality influence the shaping of identities. As one avenue he experimented with elements of Collective Memory-Work.

"Students wrote the memory pieces and analyzed them over three months. In phase one, students had to write six separate memories, most from when they were very young. In phase two, I analyzed the memories collectively with the students, developing theories so students could come to some common understanding of the socially constructed aspects of the memory. In the third phase, students re-wrote the memories, after group discussions where they challenged some 'common sense' assumptions of the memories. This gave students a chance to rewrite outside of the discourse that was available at the time they wrote and lived out the conversations or experiences described by the memory work." Towards the end of the project the collection of texts were printed in two books. "When the students finally received the books, they were excited about reading the

texts because they were anonymous, about their lives, and in a published form" (Purohit and Walsh 2003:174-5).

Christopher Walsh states that the memory-stories offered great potential to look at gender discourses. In one set of texts the students wrote about what they wanted to be (become) in the future. "As the teacher I was able to see the students' desires about what they wanted to be as constructed out of particular gendered discourses. But the struggle was to try to figure out how to get the students to see the same thing. First, I gave them a handout that asked them to list the ideas males and females had about their futures, based on the memories they had read. They were also asked to answer what they noticed about the differences between males and females' responses. On the second sheet, they pulled out direct quotes from different memories. It did not come as a surprise that many boys wanted to be policemen, firemen, and superheroes, while the girls wanted to be teachers, ballerinas, and other typically 'feminine' jobs. Looking closely at quotations from the male and female students' memories side by side made it apparent that their participation in particular discourses about what they wanted to be was a result of their being gendered subjects and using the normative language available" (ibid:175).

In this adaptation of Collective Memory-Work Christopher Walsh clearly takes on a teacher's role. He interprets this role on the basis of a critical assessment of the traditional definition of teacher (as conveyor of knowledge) and student/s (as receiver/s of knowledge). From his perspective students need to be seen as capable of understanding and analyzing discourse and teachers need to "resist viewing students as naive in the way they are often positioned to be. So although we have more experience and more access to theory, it is important that we regard student knowledge as valuable. This is about not only hearing students' voices—which in many contexts just means co-opting their ideas—but also helping them to determine the ways their voice has power and meaning in different contexts" (ibid:173). The potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning in such an example is essentially dependent on the topical contributions of the teacher.

## 10.2 PROJECT-WEEKS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Ulrike Behrens developed a concept for a 5-day-workshop with Collective Memory-Work that she tried out in nine projects with students of different age groups (7th to 12th grade) in three different school types in Germany. She had a twofold interest in these projects. She was interested to see whether the method could be successfully applied with this age group and in this environment. At the same time all projects were about the topic of "Learning" as part of her doctoral research (Behrens 2002a).

The learning environment determined certain adaptations. First there was a need to fit the work schedule into the regular time-table of the schools. All nine groups worked for four or five consecutive days always during school hours (i.e. normally five to six hours). For Ulrike Behrens this represents a significant reduction in time compared to university seminars that are running over one or two full semester.

Other adaptations concerned mainly four areas:

a) Working with theory was cut back strongly. Due to the lack of prior knowledge on the side of the students, and within the confines of the time restrictions a field review and/or a serious engagement with diverse theories (of learning) was not possible.

b) Including elements of play and relaxation took into account the difficulty of concentrating for long periods. "It is well known . . . that it makes sense to integrate elements of movement, physical activity and play as a balance to phases of high concentration. Accordingly we integrated a couple of games to counter the intensive mental work . . . but also as a way of creating a relaxed atmosphere" within the groups (Behrens 2002b:68-9).

c) Preparatory exercises were used to introduce requirements for cooperation that "cannot be taken for granted among the students", e.g. attentive listening while others speak. Playing with forms of pantomime at early stages of the project helped to get familiar with role play that was used at a later stage to act out some of the memory-scenes (ibid:69).

d) The text-analysis was didactically facilitated with the intention to reduce complexity of procedures that are seen as potentially too abstract for the students to cope with. E.g. instead of only discussing central topics of a memory-scene different small groups of students acted the respective scene out, thereby highlighting what in their understanding was particularly important. "The deconstruction of memory-scenes was taken literally. By

using scissors for cutting up the printed text we forced ourselves to take into account the entire text. . . . White spots were detected by means of an exercise in which the students had the task to think of the scene from the position of a film director. In small groups they made up checklists of background information and facts that were missing in the story to comprehend it" (ibid:70-1).

The projects in the schools were facilitated by Ulrike Behrens with the help of Heide Kutzner, Cornelia Lörpen and Eva Klöckner. Teachers of the respective classes were not included in the project work to create a work environment for the students different from normal school routine (Behrens 2002a:78). The projects were planned for students to participate on a voluntary basis. This however was not the case in all of the schools. The resulting difficulties were the same that commonly occur in mandatory lessons in regular classes. Students who would in fact prefer to do something else or who are not interested in the topic can quickly become a nuisance because they have no option to leave the room and start obstructing the work of the rest of the group. Furthermore the plan for the projects was to meet in rooms outside of the actual school buildings. For the groups that were able to adhere to this plan the Collective Memory-Work was a break with their routine. Ulrike Behrens finds that this offered several advantages, e.g. not being interrupted by a school bell, or also the "creation of a new aesthetic environment for the participants that made it easier to take their own products serious" (ibid:71).

Due to the given time-frame and the adaptations of work formats in most of the projects only one of the self-generated memory-scenes was collectively analyzed. The text-analysis was guided by the facilitators. It consisted of all the steps that were developed in the *Frauenformen* projects.

In her reflections on the work with the students in secondary schools Ulrike Behrens stresses the problem of time. She thinks that the groups did only reach intermediate results, and it would be desirable to extend the time-frame so that the initial thoughts can be developed further (Behrens 2002b, 71). These conclusions are akin to the findings in Anett Hermann's seminar. It is like scratching surfaces, finding an interesting pattern, but it is left at that and no further investigation follows.

According to Ulrike Behrens the possibly biggest obstacle for using Collective Memory-Work in schools is what she sees as an essential learning

result of school careers. She refers to it as "pupilizing"<sup>36</sup>, it consists of a number of behaviors that are well known: cheating, looking smart, only using the minimum attention necessary, letting the teacher slave away, pretending to know, etc. (Behrens 2002b:71). Whereby she sees this not as a problem of young age, it is rather a learned behavior that also applies at adult age wherever voluntariness and topical motivation are missing.

The logic of traditional schooling lets children acquire a functional orientation. What counts is the fast and effortless fulfilling of tasks. It pays off in many everyday situations. "Can we have a break when we are done?" (Behrens 2002a:111). Such an attitude stands in the way of a scrutinizing investigation of a given topic, the detection of the development, the structure, the effects of the patterns under the surface. Ulrike Behrens mentions one of the nine groups in the project as exceptional. Here the participants were genuinely interested in the topic and their contributions went beyond sheer obligation. While they were in the older age bracket of the various project groups (grade 11 and 12), Ulrike Behrens highlights another issue that played a crucial role. This group was organized as an after school activity, the students had a real choice to either take part or as well not. Those who did had a topical motivation.

In spite of all the reservations that she puts forward Ulrike Behrens still concludes that it is possible to do Collective Memory-Work with students in secondary schools as long as one is clear about the obstacles that come as a consequence of the institutional learning environment. In her concept she actively tackles these obstacles by shifting the parameters at exactly those points that bring about the pupilification of children (and youths).

In light of this a different formulation seems more fitting: Collective Memory-Work with youths is possible, if the procedures are adapted to their level of knowledge and ability to concentrate. It is not a matter of age whether or not participants are in a position to seize the learning opportunities that are offered by the method. Obviously a minimum level of abstract thinking is necessary. However, what stands in the way of making best use of Collective Memory-Work are much more institutional rules, obligations, habits, routines, and the respective attitudes, role expectations and self-images of youths. In everyday interactions status titles and labels function as attributions, and with Lucien Sève one might say: in their individual physico-psychological gestalt youths materialize the form of

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36 She borrows the term (orig. "schülern") from Asselmeyer (1996).

individuality of *student* (or *pupil*). The more they "pupilize" the less they will be able to utilize the learning opportunities offered by Collective Memory-Work.<sup>37</sup>

### 10.3 PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION IN EDUCATION

Examples of applications of Collective Memory-Work in reflection processes in the field of professional education have been mentioned already. Some of them took place in the context of doctoral studies (Rocco 1999; Masinga 2012; Stutelberg 2016), others had the character of continuing professional development (Mitchell and Weber 1999; Beals et al. 2013). In chapter 4 I used the documentation of a project with deputy managers of pre-schools to explicate the text-analysis, and in the opening chapter in the train Paul mentioned a project of teachers reflecting on rituals in schools. This project happened 2011 in Ireland. I facilitated a course that included eight meetings for a group of four teachers in a local education center. The process in this course followed the lines sketched in the diagram in chapter 2.

The first two meetings were used for a topical introduction, finding a guiding question and defining a writing trigger. Four meetings were used to analyze memory-scenes and another two at the end of the course for a transfer of the discussion to focus (back) on the professional practice of the teachers.

The most important adaptation in this group relates to the role definition and the tasks in the project. For the participants to conduct a field review of published theories on ritual and ritualizations in school was unrealistic in the given time-frame. All of them worked as full-time teachers, had a family and further social commitments (e.g. sport, music). Hence the task of reviewing literature rested with me as the facilitator. I brought material from this review into the discussions and provided the links to theories wherever possible and/or necessary.

I also provided guidance in relation to the structure of the sessions, and particularly at the time of the first text-analysis. However, the teachers picked it up very fast and in our second text-analysis they already worked quite confidently with the memory-scene. We also shared tasks of documentation and note taking. Nevertheless facilitation in such a project is

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37 It should be clear from the above that 'pupilizing' happens in all age groups.



of crucial importance. The task for me as the facilitator was first of all to make sure that the participants felt safe enough in the group to bring in their personal contributions. The second task then was to also bring my own input into the discussions without taking on a lecturer's position.

The position of the facilitator is modeled along the lines of the organic intellectual. "I call the person leading memory work an organic intellectual. Coined originally by Gramsci, it denotes the figure within the group who assumes the intellectual tasks for the group. When doing memory work, there is no division of labor when it comes to writing the remembered experiences. Because the leader has had the same experiences, she should be free from the expert feeling and be able to participate in mutual discussion. This arrangement stirs up imagination while avoiding elitist judgment" (Haug 2008:26). Accordingly the facilitator also writes a memory-scene, and this scene is equally considered when it comes to text-analysis.

The concrete interpretation of the facilitator's role is yet in need of situational adaptation. The descriptions of teaching concepts in university (chapter 8) show quite clearly that lecturers choose different ways to guide groups through the process. Outside of university facilitation also needs to be adjusted along the requirements of the concrete learning environment.

## **10.4 COLLECTIVE MEMORY-WORK IN TRAINING COURSES FOR EDUCATORS**

In the German education system there are different training courses and qualifications for teachers and educators. The former normally study at universities while the latter are trained in academies.<sup>38</sup> In four projects I applied the method of memory-work with prospective educators in such academies (Hamm 2017). Three of these projects took place as seminars held on five consecutive days, one of the projects ran over six days with two days per week. Three projects involved a full class of 25 participants, the fourth one consisted of a group of six students.

In their feedback on these applications students spoke quite positively about procedures and work formats they had experienced during the

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38 Orig. 'Fachschule' or 'Fachakademie'. The fields of work are also demarcated: teachers work in schools, educators in all other educational institutions like pre-schools, crèches, after-school-care, youth work etc.

seminars, and they highlighted the difference between those and the regular lessons. In one of the projects the feedback particularly drew on working in small groups and using rounds, i.e. sitting in a circle for discussion instead of a frontal seating order, having open discussions with everyone's participation encouraged instead of listening to lectures. This feedback is quite remarkable because exactly these work formats are frequently applied in their regular lessons also. When the peculiar perception of the same as something different was pointed out to the students, they looked for explanations why they experienced these (same) procedures and practices differently in the seminar. In their attempts to explain the different experiences they reverted to supposed personal qualities, i.e. the facilitator being such a "cool guy." Such an explanation is far too short. The reason for the reversal in perception is rather found in a suspension of institutional matrices. Clearly, among the teaching staff there are lots of "cool guys," and clearly, teachers go a long way to prepare their lessons in a way to make them entertaining, engaging, meet students' interests and involve them in any way possible.

What distinguishes the position of the teachers essentially from the one of an external facilitator is the obligation to mark the work of students. The "cool guy" has to disappear when it comes to grading. This is something the students know quite well. Accordingly the social relationships between teachers and students are overshadowed by the marking context. Furthermore, the learning process in Collective Memory-Work is open-ended. There are no fixed results defined in advance, they only appear in the process. As such it is fundamentally different to learning processes in which the outcome is already set in a curriculum before the learner is even physically present, and in which a (random) learner is supposed to reproduce such predetermined results. Training academies for educators follow such a set curriculum. It may be formulated in as open a manner as you like, for the students the curricular requirements are demands they are supposed to meet so as to successfully have their actions translated by the teachers into a numerical scale of marks and grades. If teachers introduce different work formats these are only different pathways to eventually the same predetermined destination. In this regard the work formats are irrelevant and random. Whatever way the teacher formulates a task, whatever format is used, the final destination is always anticipated by students and plays as background noise during the actual work process.

The focus for the facilitator in the Collective Memory-Work project however is on finding a shared interest, taking the starting point of the individuals and the group as point of departure for a learning journey to a not yet known destination. Such an approach allows the participants in the project to decide where they want to go. Neither process nor product are subject to marking or grading. That in turn accounts for perceiving the same formats in quite different ways. The "cool guy" is cool because he does not (and does not have to) patronize the learning process, which also means he can authentically bring into this process his own position. But this position is not regarded as the voice of the institution, it does not have to be accepted by students and regurgitated in an exam. It can stand as a contribution in a discussion with the aim to find the most rational explanation for a given problem.

If Collective Memory-Work is planned and offered by teachers in such learning environments it is always a question how far it is possible to come to an honest suspension of institutional matrices. As long as the institutional requirements are not subject to a structural change the answer will always depend on negotiations among individuals on local level. It will be situational, but at any rate it will be situated in a field of tension. It can be regarded as a welcome side-effect of bringing Collective Memory-Work as an intervention into this field that the respective negotiations may contribute to a further erosion of the institutional matrices.

## **10.5 COLLECTIVE MEMORY-WORK WITH PEDAGOGUES IN AUSTRIA**

An application of Collective Memory-Work in Austria brought students and teachers of a training academy for early childcare educators together with students and lecturers in teacher training courses. The project was facilitated by Rosemarie Ortner and Marion Thuswald. It was included in a series of research studios that looked at possibilities of transfer of research methods into learning environments. All research studios worked with a topical focus on dealing with differences in educational practice. The joint title was "Facing the Differences" (Ortner and Thuswald 2012).

A total of 18 participants took part in the Collective Memory-Work project. It ran over two semester. The group met and worked together on four full

days and four half days. The project largely followed the structure depicted in the diagram in chapter 2. Memory-scenes were analyzed in small groups of four to six. In the template for text-analysis that was given to the small groups a section was added that asked for the group to discuss alternative routes of action for the protagonist(s) in the memory-scene. For this step the small groups used the drawing of cartoons. "Every subject construction is linked to particular ways of acting, is shaped by those, respectively opens them as options and closes down others. Different actions shift subject constructions and vice versa. . . . The drawings were meant to 'play through' alternative actions as concrete as possible, and also to find further ways of acting" (ibid:69).

For the step of collating the results of the small groups Rosemarie Ortner and Marion Thuswald used a format of "analytic narrative." Participants of a small group told the others in a plenary meeting what they had discussed in their text-analysis, what suggestions were made, what conclusions drawn. Another person took notes of this recount and used the notes to write a summarizing text that in turn was discussed and adapted by the small group. The procedure of analytic narrative allowed the groups to produce a collective text without having to draft it themselves in the first place (ibid.).

A specific feature in this project is the heterogeneous group composition. Participants in the project held different status positions (teachers, students) in their respective institutions. The project was planned on the assumption that regardless of their institutional status the participants shared a common positioning as members in a field of professional education and that they would be able to get involved as experts of their own pedagogical practices.

Retrospectively Rosemarie Ortner and Marion Thuswald note that for some of the participants their self-images as students dominated over an understanding of being part of a community of practice in professional education (ibid:77). Difficulties in the collaboration started already at a level of addressing each other. One of the teachers who took part in the project mentions in her feedback that she recognized the difficulties on the side of students to address her on a first name basis. This would be in contrast to the official formula of addressing each other in the institutional context of their academy, in which they find themselves every other day of the year. "In our school it is simply unusual that students address teachers by their first names. Some coped well with it, others avoided any form of address until the end" (Gerda Jelenc, in Ortner 2012:106). Thus Collective Memory-

Work "was an experiment to work within hierarchically structured educational institutions with a concept of collectivity based on a critique of hierarchies. The research group was determined as heterogeneous upfront, and at the same time the participants were counterfactual conceptualized as equal researchers. This appellation is in parts contradictory, but exactly for this reason it opened space for negotiations, an experimental field for reflection and restructuring of powerful practices" (Ortner and Thuswald 2012:78).

On the basis of their experiences with this project Marion Thuswald wrote a manual for using Collective Memory-Work for reflection processes on pedagogical issues in arrangements of teaching and learning<sup>39</sup> (Thuswald, no date). In detailed descriptions she sketches 12 phases of conducting a project that runs over at least 25 hours. These phases are:

- Establish a framework of collaborative teamwork
- Speak about pedagogical situations
- Agree on a trigger for writing
- Write memory-scenes (stories)
- Get to know the memory-stories
- Work with the template for text-analysis
- Discuss the text-analyses
- Write an analytic narrative
- Use image theater to make relationships visible<sup>40</sup>
- Draw cartoons about action possibilities
- Collate the analyses
- Review and reflect on the collaboration

No other publication on Collective Memory-Work provides a depiction of individual steps and procedures as minute as this one. This may be illustrated by referring to the third phase where the group is supposed to agree on a trigger for writing. The manual suggests a unit of two hours with a set structure:

- What is a trigger (10 minutes)
- Brainstorming (10 minutes)
- Formulate suggestions for triggers for writing (15 minutes)
- Assessment of suggested triggers (30 minutes)
- Discussion and decision in plenary (45 minutes)

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39 The other research studios in "Facing the Differences" also led to similar publications. See <http://www.facingthedifferences.at/>.

40 Image theater here refers to the same practice as mentioned in chapter 3.

- Formulate task for writing of memory-scene (10 minutes)

In the manual each single step during this unit is further described, commented and suggestions added, e.g. the assessment of suggested triggers that were written on large posters: "All triggers that are not suitable for one or more participants in the group are marked »x«, the others are marked »+« (suits everyone), or »-« (could do, but is not perfect). Then the posters are exchanged among the small groups and again marked in the same fashion. This is repeated until all groups have marked all posters. The time for small groups working with one poster should be kept at a few minutes to avoid the process to become too long" (ibid:20).

The manual is written with teachers, lecturers and facilitators in educational training in mind. Its meticulous descriptions make it into a possible script for a didactic unit, thereby addressing the often found request for ready-made solutions.

## **10.6 CHANGING PERSPECTIVE IN STORY-TELLING WORKSHOPS**

The term script is also used by Jo Krøjer and Camilla Hutters in their manual for story-telling workshops which they wrote for a pilot project in Danish adult education centers (2006). The aim of the project was to develop a concept for a course that could help youths and young adults in their decision making process regarding their choice of profession. The background for it was the observation that the disappearance of traditions and formerly accepted authorities in society made it increasingly complex for young people to develop a meaningful context in their life. Many adolescents experienced the decision making on a potential career pathway as quite difficult. Due to their level of informality and ease of access adult education centers were deemed a suitable institutional framework to establish support programs.

In the pilot project Jo Krøjer and Camilla Hutters organized three workshops. In total 19 young adults in an age bracket between 19 and 25 took part. The workshops were labeled "Story-telling Workshop" because of the central position that the stories told by participants gained in them. But they also expanded beyond simple story telling by using written accounts along the lines of Collective Memory-Work.

The concept of the story-telling workshop is based on an 8 hour program stretching over two days. Dividing the program in two parts is a deliberate move to allow for more intense reflection processes. The different phases of the workshop include (Krøjer and Hutter 2006:35 - 42):

#### *Day 1*

- Introduction and getting to know each other
- Brainstorming on topic
- Topical interviews
  - Participants interview each other in pairs
  - Results are collected
- First writing phase
- Reading out memory-stories
  - Questions and comments on memory-stories

#### *Day 2*

- Second writing phase (revising the memory-stories)
- Reading out of revised versions of memory-stories
  - Comments and Questions on revised versions, e.g.
    - What stands out in the new account?
    - What was the most important discovery?
- Outlook, possibilities for action, relating to society at large
  - What options do protagonists have in the situations?
  - What advice can we give to politicians?

The concept for these workshops is laid out for a group size of four to eight participants. In the manual there are detailed descriptions for the different phases with suggestions for, e.g. recruiting procedures, how to design a suitable location, break times.

What stands out in this model is the double writing phase. During the first phase the texts are to be written from a first person singular perspective. The texts are read out by the authors to the group. The other participants ask about content and give feedback on their impressions of the story. For this feedback approx. 20 minutes are reserved. In their manual Jo Krøjer and Camilla Hutter highlight the importance of keeping the tendency of immediate problem solving at bay. This refers to feedback by listeners who react to the story with on the spot solutions: Do this, do that, it will solve

the problem. Such suggestions are normally based on partial knowledge only, they don't clarify anything. In contrast, they prevent a thorough scrutinization of the problematic. The facilitator is asked to intervene against such tendencies. From the discussions during the first day of the workshop the authors of the memory-stories take with them the questions and comments of their fellow group members, and they sleep on it.

The next day starts with the second writing phase in which the memory-stories are revised and rewritten. This time they are written in third person singular ("she, he"). The revised versions take into account those questions and comments from the day before that are still important for the authors. They create a distinct title for their stories. Again the stories are read out by the authors to the rest of the group. Group members now also pay attention to changes in the stories and potentially new impressions gained from it.

In their feedback on the process participants report of new insights gained from the change of writing position. The move from "I" to the distanced third person writing is experienced as a way to gain new perspectives on the (old) problems, and due to it being supported by the group's comments and questions all the more productive. What was formerly a story depicting an isolated and individual experience becomes a shared and common story that lets the experience appear in many new colors (ibid:27-9).

The shared problematic of participants in the pilot project was the difficulty in making decisions about career pathways. Jo Krøjer and Camilla Hutter repeatedly point out that in the workshops it was not the aim for participants to find their "right choice." It was not a collective job counseling session. Rather the objective was for participants to gain and increase insights into the entire context that leads to their difficulties in decision making. That includes social relations that in fact provide the background for such difficulties emerging in the first place. It clearly points to the socio-political dimension of the story-telling workshops.

In this adaptation of Collective Memory-Work the facilitator(s) again assume a central position. The institutional environment (adult education centers) accounts for a number of clearly assigned responsibilities on their side, starting with logistics, organization, time-keeping. They also monitor the group process. Participants may share a similar problematic, but they come together without a shared orientation. And the time-frame over the two days does not allow for a group developing a deeper collective bond. The facilitator(s) guide the group through the different work phases and keep discussions on track, e.g. by advising against immediate problem



solving, or by bringing interwovenness of individual and society into the discussion. For groups who have worked with the format of story-telling workshops already it is possible to distribute tasks differently.

## **10.7 MIND SCRIPTING:**

### **COLLECTIVE MEMORY-WORK WITH SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS**

As a last example of applications of Collective Memory-Work in learning environments outside of universities the adaptation by Doris Allhutter shall be mentioned. She used the method with two commercial software development teams in Austria, one in game design and another one in search engine development. In her reports about the projects she uses the term *mind scripting* for the method as applied (Allhutter 2012).

Both companies in which the projects took place employed about 20 people of whom the core teams of approx. 12 staff members who worked in software development participated. The cooperation between the teams and Doris Allhutter was sanctioned by the management of the companies after consultation with their staff. For the teams the idea was to engage in a reflection process on their everyday practices with the aim to find ways for improvement. Doris Allhutter brought into the projects a further interest relating to the question how gender is inscribed into computer programs.

Her reasoning for introducing a new term for the method grew out of the anticipated expectations of participants in the field. It seemed a likely scenario that people in software development will find a title like mind scripting more appealing than Collective Memory-Work. The decision to re-label the method therefore was a pragmatic one that took into account the common jargon in the IT-sector (and in the field of management courses).

Prior to entering into the team activities interviews were held with each participant. "To specify appropriate topics for the case studies, we first conducted interviews with the teams that consisted of managers, system designers, programmers, and graphic and sound designers. This gave us an idea of the respective fields and organizational contexts" (ibid:692). The results of these interviews helped to identify topical areas in which the teams might benefit from an intense reflection process.

E.g., for the game design team: "They had just developed a particular game. And they had set as a target for themselves to improve their quality.

We<sup>41</sup> asked them what they thought quality consists of, how exactly they wish to improve their quality and what concepts of quality in relation to IT they had in their minds to achieve it. We then worked with them on the topic of implicit assumptions about quality" (Doris Allhutter, personal communication May 4, 2018).

In their first meeting the group agreed on a trigger for writing memory-scenes ("The last time she or he tried out a computer game"). Texts were written in third person singular between the first and the second group meeting and participants brought them to the meeting. To introduce the deconstruction of the texts a sample story from another project was read out and in a presentation of approximately 15 minutes duration the categories for the deconstruction were explained (subjects, acts, emotions, motivations, clichés etc.). Participants were instructed to concentrate solely on working with the text and not try to analyze the author. Then one of the memory-scenes written by a group member was used for a first collective analysis. This was done together by the entire team. Following from there the teams split in small working groups. Each group was joined by a facilitator. "We did not only ask the questions. We also tried at times to guide them so that they detect connections. For instance in the texts that were written from the perspective of a user there was always a kind of switch where the authors wrote from a professional perspective. The language used there sounded differently. It was brought into connection, different topics in a different style of writing. To make something like this transparent that was our role too" (ibid.).

The results of the deconstruction however were not discussed or analyzed any further in the small groups. "We did not do this step together with the group. The critique of theory, that was my analytic task" (ibid.). The conclusions that Doris Allhutter drew from the collection of deconstructions of the memory-scenes were brought back to the group in another meeting. She put her suggestions to the group for discussion. After this discussion the facilitators produced a case study report that was forwarded to the team.

The role of facilitation in this application is akin to an external management consultation. Facilitators in these projects did not write memory-scenes. But they took on essential tasks in the process of text-analysis. The topical transfer, a recursive loop towards the initial problematic

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41 Doris Allhutter was supported in this project by Sara John and Edeltraut Hanappi-Egger.

is not discussed in the group. The responsibility for introducing interpretive propositions and transfer rests on the facilitators. In the concrete situation of an internal reflection process within the company setting this has a relief function for the participants. Obviously the team meetings are still influenced by the professional environment and personal (inter-)dependencies that extend beyond the particular situation.

Doris Allhutter regards mind scripting as "a collective method in which results are gained through negotiating meaning constructions between participants" (Allhutter 2012:687). In the concrete implementation within the team however the professional and personal relationships among staff members are of utmost importance. At the time when Doris Allhutter presented her summary of propositions derived from the deconstructions that were done by the small groups she realized "that at the beginning the discussion was quite lively and in both projects the managers of the companies wanted to put things straight" (Doris Allhutter, personal communication May 4, 2018). Here the external facilitator can act as devil's advocate. Thus it is possible to bring topics up for discussion that are otherwise kept under the carpet. In this way Collective Memory-Work opens up spaces for negotiation. How far such spaces can be opened up and used is a matter of testing in each single case. "In the team with the search engines we also spoke about autonomy and heteronomy. That brings up topics related to ideological ideas about work practices. It is impossible to avoid this, and in fact it is also a good thing. But in a hierarchical environment it is a balancing act. It can be allowed to happen, and at the same time it needs to be contained in a way that makes it acceptable for everyone. We started from the assumption that it is necessary to talk about hierarchies if learning about certain topics or emancipatory learning is supposed to be possible. To do this in a way that does not leave everything in a heap means walking a tight rope" (ibid.).

## 11 PAUL AND TINA

Paul: Tina, haven't seen you for ages. How did you get on with the memory-work group?

Tina: Great, we are at it for half a year already.

Paul: I remember you mentioning that you had intended to meet once a month.

Tina: Correct. We meet on a Saturday and reserve the whole day for it, from 10 in the morning to 5 in the evening. Everyone brings some food, we have breaks, one of the days we went for a two hour walk through town.

Paul: And how many are in the group?

Tina: We are seven. We started with nine. John, Maggie and I had spread the word about our plan among friends, John also used the email list of the trade union. That worked. Three people from the union joined us, two men and a woman. One of the men is a union rep in the public sector, the other one works as an electrician and is organized with a syndicalist group. The woman was a union member for just a year. She left our group after two meetings. Marion brought two friends, one being an old feminist acquaintance and the other a young drama teacher who works on precarious contracts. I brought a colleague from our seminar house, but she has also left already.

Paul: Why did the two leave the group again?

Tina: My colleague found it too much to commit after her mother had an accident and needed care for at least the next year. The woman from the union said, it is a question of time. But I believe she didn't like the slow analytic ways in which we work. I always thought in our meetings she appeared to be a bit rushed.

Paul: Youthful impatience?

Tina: Not at all. She is in her 40s. The electrician is mid-20s. The drama teacher also just finished her training. Age is not an argument in our group.

Paul: And how did you approach the method?

Tina: Between Maggie, John and myself we had agreed to use the idea of expectations of expectations as the initial theme. You know, all those stories where you do what you think others expect you to do, unwritten rules and so on. That was also what we used in our invitations. Our first

meeting was only three hours long. But that was so interesting and enjoyable that from then on we organized to meet for a full day. Stephen, the guy in the public sector, had some difficulty with that arrangement because he normally does the cooking at weekends at home, but he managed somehow. The drama teacher plays in a hockey-team, but her matches are always on a Sunday. For the rest of us it wasn't a problem anyway.

Paul: That is the organizational side.

Tina: Of course! Organization is key. We are not at a university or in an adult education center with fixed timetables and a full-time lecturer who takes care that everything runs as it should.

Paul: But I am also interested in how you got a grip on the method, writing stories, text-analysis and all of that. That is what people often imagine as oh so difficult.

Tina: In our first meeting Maggie took the lead. That wasn't even planned. She gave a brief introduction on how we got the idea to start the group. And then she simply facilitated the rest of the meeting. The most important agreement on that day was for us to not be rushed, go step by step, no pressure, no fixed target, purely go and see where we arrive. I guess that was the issue that the woman from the union found difficult. She seemed more driven by target setting.

Paul: And did you talk about expectations of expectations already at that stage?

Tina: It came up frequently, yes. Everyone knew that this was our topical entry route. If they had had no connection to the topic they wouldn't have been there. It was already present when we did a round to introduce ourselves. But we did not go deep into it at the beginning. We mostly spoke about the method. At the end of the meeting we did a round on questions that we had about expectations of expectations. But that was a bit scattered. Everyone was like: Why do we do all these funny things? But that is not a suitable question. We needed to be more concrete. So we looked at different areas of life to concentrate on one in order to not get lost in a diffuse hotchpotch of behaviors. I suggested to read a piece on economic constraints and interpersonal relationships by Klaus Ottomeyer.<sup>42</sup> That is where he talks about the three areas, do you know it?

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42 Ottomeyer (2004)

Paul: You mean the areas of market, work and private life?

Tina: Exactly, we decided to concentrate on the area of work. Market we found not interesting. Private life offered something. But we thought it might be too diverse among our group. The area of work seemed easier. This discussion took us the entire morning.

Paul: You talk about your second meeting already?

Tina: Yes, the afternoon we spent on telling stories.

Paul: Telling, but not writing yet?

Tina: No, not yet. Everyone told their story, whatever came to mind when they thought about expectations of expectations at work. It was a hilarious collection, swearing an oath to become a public servant, going for beer on the building site, high heels for the job interview, all clichés that you can think of. We laughed ourselves to tears by times. The others gave the story-tellers feedback, mainly questions if something was unclear. In some cases the stories mixed up different events. We then thought about which to write. We wanted the written scenes to be there for the next meeting.

Paul: Did you not formulate a trigger?

Tina: We followed the suggestion of the Swedish women to first write stories in general on expectations of expectations at work, then to analyze them and try to find new and surprising perspectives. Since then we had three meetings. In each of them we worked with one of our stories. All the stuff with table and what have you. But what I find most interesting is always what comes afterwards. I would even say we have developed a certain routine already. In the morning we do text-analysis. Then we eat together. In the afternoon we do a topical transfer. I mentioned already, one of the days we went for a walk. That came as a result of our text-analysis in the morning. The story was about working as a bicycle courier and how expectations of expectations differ in different parts of the town. We went through town and looked at the different sceneries. In our last meeting we watched a movie that was linked to the memory-scene we had analyzed in the morning.

Paul: That means you had five meetings already, and you worked with three memory-scenes. How long do you want to continue with the texts?

Tina: We do one more. Then we plan a second round of writing. But don't ask me about the writing trigger yet, I could only guess.

Paul: Sounds fascinating. Do you think I could join you for once?

Tina: I would have to check with the rest of the group. Our next meeting is already Saturday coming. Better would probably be the meeting after that. You could even bring a memory-scene on our new writing topic.

Paul: Sure, ask and let me know. It would be great meeting you all.

Email Tina to Paul

*Hi Paul,*

*We spoke about inviting you to our next meeting. Everyone was happy with the idea.*

*As an entry-ticket you need to bring a written memory-scene. You remember the story of the bike courier, and how different spaces in town were important in it. In most of our stories we detected links to space, regulation of space, appropriation of space and so on. Thus we decided to write stories under the title "The Door." The only requirement is that the scene relates to the area of work.*

*In the meeting we use the morning to look at our work process so far. We intend to draw on two resources. The first one is literature on Collective Memory-Work. Maggie has put together a selection and we all pick one or two pieces each to read. The second resource is yourself! We intend to needle you with questions, be warned.*

*In the afternoon we are going to read the new stories and comment on them. Yours included if you can stick with us that long.*

*Best*

*Tina*

## Introductory Workshops

For anyone interested in a practical topical introduction to Collective Memory-Work, interactive series of workshops can be organised online or in person.

They are always tailored to match local topical interests.

They can take place in any given environment, institutional, formal, informal. The only condition is that participation is voluntary and participants have an interest in both the chosen topic and the method.

The best format is a series of five or six sessions, each lasting three hours, and stretched over consecutive weeks.

If you are interested in organising such an introduction to Collective Memory-Work,

contact:

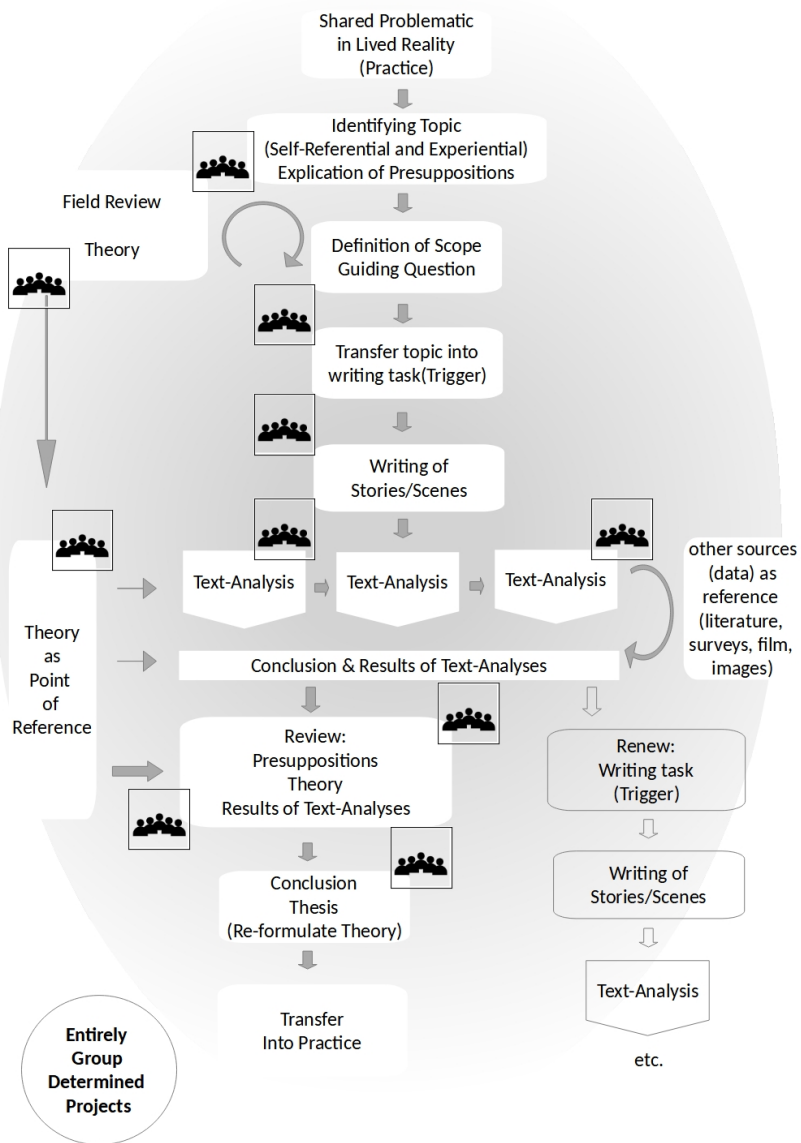
[info@collectivememorywork.net](mailto:info@collectivememorywork.net)



## 12 PROJECT DESIGN: TASKS AND POTENTIAL FOR LEARNING

From all that was said so far in this book it is quite clear that there is a lot of room for adapting Collective Memory-Work according to local circumstances and aims for the project. The diagram in chapter 2 showed the phases of a prototypical project. The advantage of such a visualization is that the entire schedule of a project can be seen at once. Its disadvantage is that it suggests a clarity that is absent in real life. To understand the nuances in procedures, possible obstacles during the project, or effects of conceptual decisions at the beginning that only emerge at the end, further explanations are needed.

In the earlier diagram the different steps on the way were depicted in their sequential order, i. e. the *What* and the *When* of a project. Questions of *Who* and *How* were touched on in the chapters on different adaptations. These questions are to be included in the considerations during the planning phase. Depending on the answers given there will be different consequences in the practical application of the method. In line with the focus on the potential of Collective Memory-Work as a method of learning I am going to present five more diagrams. They show the effects of different models of adjusting the method in terms of actors. For this purpose the diagram will be populated (in form of pictograms) and slightly altered wherever applicable, and the visualizations of the models are further explained and commented on.



## 12.1 MODEL 1: ENTIRELY GROUP DETERMINED PROJECTS

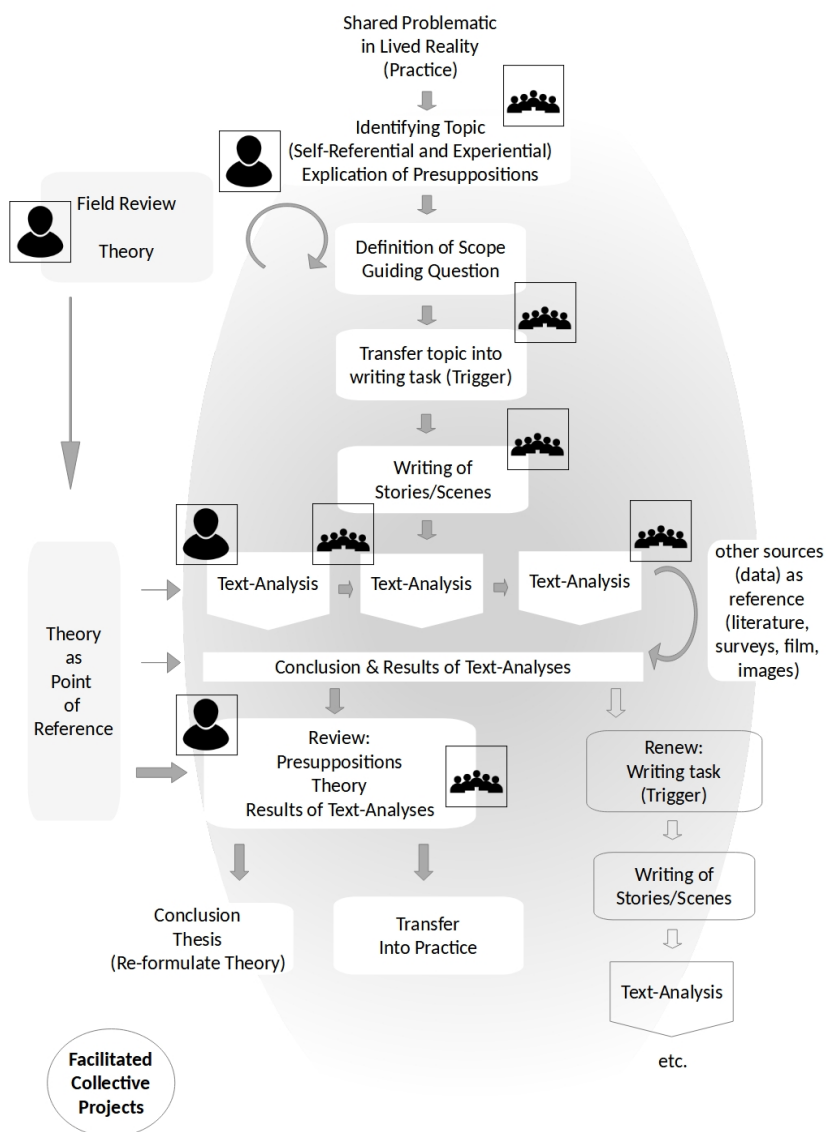
In the first model all group members are involved in all aspects of the work. This does not exclude delegation. Some group members may study a particular piece of literature and report back to the entire group. In cases of larger groups the analysis of memory-scenes can be done by sub-groups whereby the results of such analyses are then collated in plenary meetings. However, all work processes and the topical direction of the project are at all times decided by the entire group. For every group member being involved in every step of the process the learning opportunities are all-embracing. This is emphasized by the highlighted background.

This model is particularly suitable for groups who auto-didactically start using the method. An example of such a group is the collective of Judith Kaufman and her colleagues (see chapter 3). Obviously it is similarly possible for groups whose members are already firm in using the method. It helps if the group works over a longer period (and possibly even with different topics) in the same composition.<sup>43</sup>

For a group to be able to work in this manner it is necessary that on top of a strong commitment to the group's success participants can invest the time to engage in a potentially lengthy process. It helps if the group members are not too far apart in terms of extent of knowledge about the respective topic, and experience of working in groups. But at the same time, this is not an absolute requirement. In the collective work process knowledge differentials will inevitably level out (in varying degrees, obviously depending on the concrete activities/exchanges). And the sheer doing of Collective Memory-Work will leave participants with experience in working with a group.

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43 For instance, Rachel Thomson (2019) reports of a group of women in social sciences in England who over a period of 15 or more years came together regularly to reflect on their research projects, and in doing so used Collective Memory-Work.



## 12.2 MODEL 2: FACILITATED COLLECTIVE PROJECTS

For groups who can't or don't want to enter into a process of complete self-reliance (with possible detours in trial and error) a facilitation can be an advantage. Melanie Stitz is of the opinion "that at the beginning facilitation is helpful in Collective Memory-Work. Otherwise a group may turn in circles or be stuck at a certain point wanting to come to a unified view where different aspects can simply stand beside each other. . . . For everyone to sit together and simply start works better in groups that are familiar with the method and where the group members have experience working together. If Collective Memory-Work is done for the first time it needs an introduction for everyone, explaining what is going to happen, the basic assumptions and ground rules for working together" (Stitz and Stier 2020:380). She also points to the option to rotate the role of facilitator which is a feature that suits groups in which more than one (or possible all) members are accustomed already to using the method.

Besides the necessity to get to know the method there are purely practical aspects to consider. If Collective Memory-Work is used, e.g. in an adult education center, on-the-job training or similar settings, it is in most cases rather unlikely that participants are able to study literature in preparation. This task remains with the person(s) who facilitate the respective projects. Such a scenario shifts the learning opportunities for participants in the project. It does not mean that they are excluded from prior engagement with literature (existing theories), but it is not a requirement. If they don't do it, it will neither lead to topical deadlock nor will it create conflict within the group, e.g. because of accusations of not having done their "homework." Instead, it makes sense to take advantage of the accumulated theoretical knowledge of a group member in the role of facilitator. The starting point for such projects is still a shared problematic in lived reality.

In this model the facilitator is included in all work phases like any other member of the group. S/he also writes a memory-scene that can be similarly used for text-analysis. The facilitator acts as organic intellectual within the group. For projects in which the number of participants requires breaking up in smaller units when working with the memory-scenes, the facilitator's role needs to be defined according to the needs of the group, e.g. if participants need assistance in text-analysis it may be better if the facilitator initially supports the different small groups rather than integrating in one of them

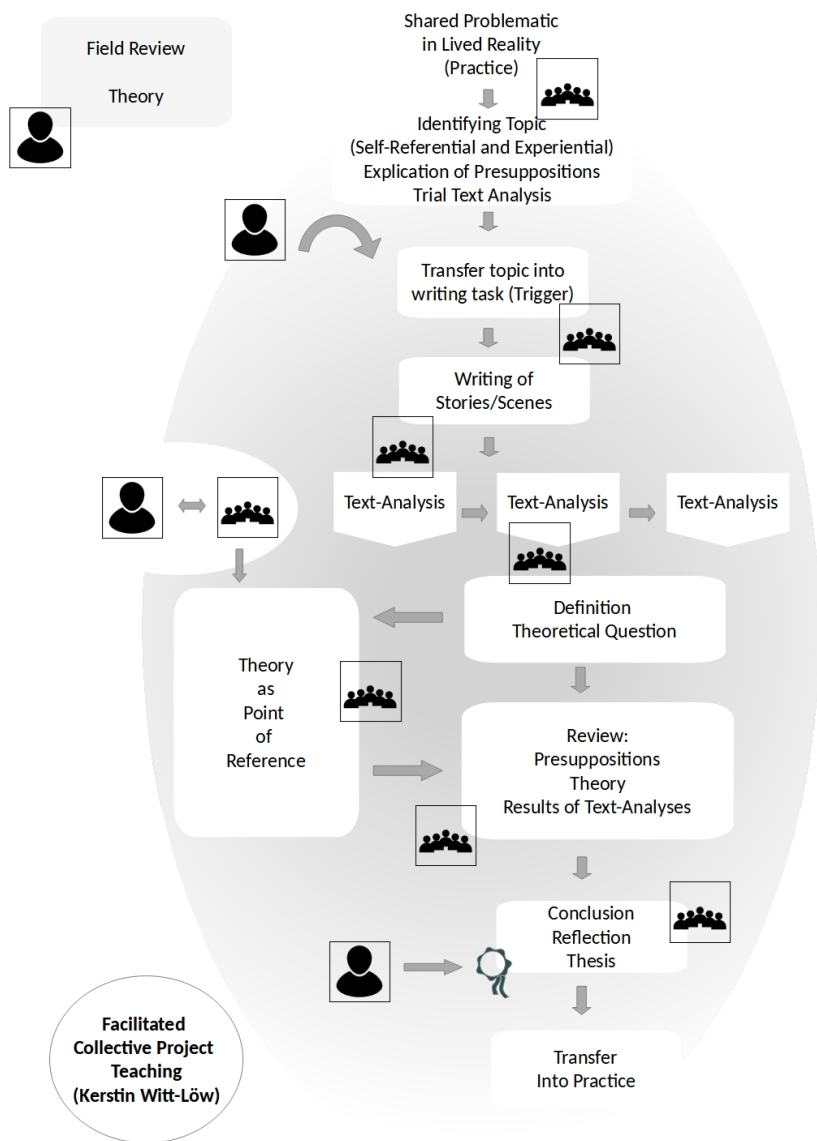
completely. At the same time, if a project includes more than one round of text-analysis it is in most cases feasible for small groups to work independently with memory-scenes after one or two attempts already. Not the least the continuous work with the text is also a qualification process and participants learn rather fast how to do text-analysis.

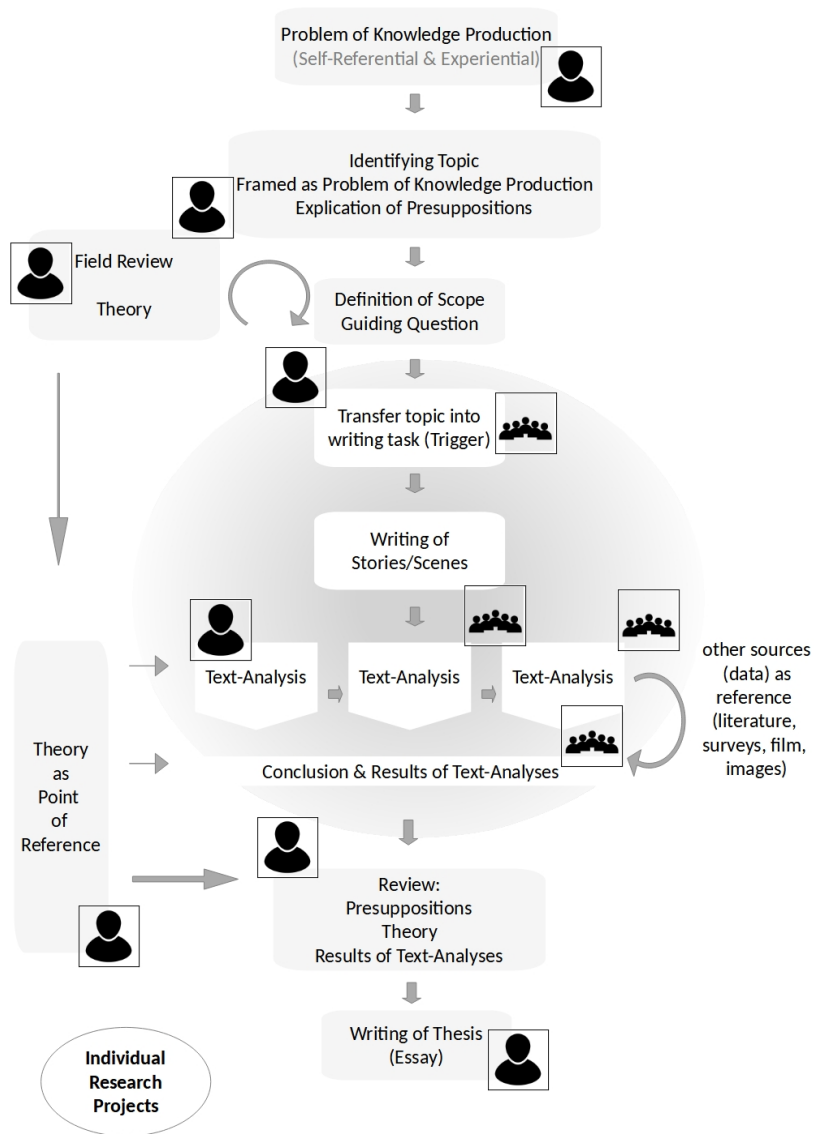
### **12.3 MODEL 3: FACILITATION AS MENTORING**

The third model is a visualization of the adaptation in teaching where facilitation is understood as a means of mentoring (here based on the teaching concept of Kerstin Witt-Löw, see above chapter 8). The facilitator in this case remains outside of the group process, does not write a memory-scene and does not take part in the text-analysis. If need be s/he may introduce and demonstrate the text-analysis with a sample text in a plenary session. The groups work to the most part independently, but they keep in contact with the facilitator during the different work phases and if required they can call for support. Fixed dates for supervision sessions in which interim results are reported and discussed help to reflect the work processes and identify potential routes for further investigation.

The specific learning environment, e.g. in a university setting may account for the grading of work as a requirement. The consequences of the context of grading for Collective Memory-Work projects has been discussed at length already. However, the disturbances that come into play by having an orientation towards exchange value as an undercurrent throughout a project don't change the conceptual direction that aims at providing certain learning opportunities. Students who take part in such a seminar are from the outset involved in all learning activities that the method offers.

This model (minus the grading element) is very well suited also in other contexts, e.g. political groups, professional reflection processes, further education courses.







## 12.4 MODEL 4: INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROJECTS

There are a number of adaptations of Collective Memory-Work that took place in the context of postgraduate studies. Some have been mentioned above (e.g., Behrens 2002a; Masinga 2012; Stutelberg 2016). Other examples include Lynn Burnett in Australia (2007) on the topic of experiences of young lesbians in their post-coming-out phase, Ralph Hammond in England (2013) on the topic of professional identity of physiotherapists, Prabha Jerrybandan in Canada (2015) on the topic of self-images and history of Indo-Caribbean women in Canada, and Maria Vlachou in England (2016) on the topic of experiences of international business students in the context of globalization of academic studies.

In such projects the initial problem is framed as a problem of knowledge production within academic conventions. Thus the initiators take on all tasks up to the definition of a guiding (research) question. Normally it is only at this stage that participants are recruited. Obviously it is possible that the initiators know potential participants in advance (e.g. on professional or private basis) and that informally they are in contact even at the very beginning. However, commonly in this model participants are conceptually excluded from involvement in the early parts of the project. If they were involved in them, the initiators would risk their work being reprimanded or even rejected by supervisors and academic exam committees for not demonstrating the individual capacities for gaining a postgraduate degree.

Another difficulty that can arise if participants in the project are included in all aspects of project planning, design and trajectory is that questions can be shifted at an early stage into a direction that leads away from the problematic that has been chosen for the thesis by the postgraduate student. Such shifts are very welcome in contexts outside of academia, but for purposes of gaining a masters or a doctoral degree it poses the threat of moving the group's work outside of the area of the study envisaged by the initiator(s).

The concluding steps of revising theory, presuppositions, results of text-analysis and formulating the final report (here: in form of a thesis) remain the task of the initiators. The reasons are the same as earlier: the candidates

are supposed to deliver a result that is solely their own work.<sup>44</sup> That is why in such projects the participants are involved in discussing and defining the trigger, writing the memory-scenes, analyzing them and potentially bringing individual text-analyses into a concluding discussion, but not more. The researcher|researched divide is therefore in parts reintroduced into the concept for this model. This is not due to the bad will or ignorance on the side of the initiators, it is a compromise with contemporary hegemonic assumptions in the academic field.

The contradictory situation into which postgraduate students maneuver themselves when they use Collective Memory-Work has been reflected on by a good few. E.g., Lynn Burnett: "The nature of a doctoral study ultimately means that one person has more invested financially and emotionally than others who make up the Memory Work group. . . . The tension between a desire to share the power of voice equally among all participants, consistent with Memory Work methodology, and the realities of academic power structures was keenly felt by the author of this study. . . . While each participant gained new insights and understandings about themselves and others, only the author could make the final decisions regarding the meta analysis and voice, as it is currently only acceptable within tertiary institutions for Faculty of Education doctoral dissertations to be authored by one person. While the group's contribution and initial analysis is recognized as pivotal to this particular methodology, the nature of doctoral studies necessitates the exclusion of the group at some level during the process in order for the author's individual meta analysis to occur" (2007:269).

The initiators have a structurally caused surplus of aims and objectives. That even filters through to concrete material practices. "By situating myself within the group, I had to try to relinquish control of meetings yet also felt a compulsion to want to drive the study through. This tension did not recede. I was constantly anxious about when and how to intervene during the meetings, when to let the flow of the discussion continue, even when we

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44 How sole is solely, that is another question. The intellectual genius who evaporates new knowledge from the inner depths of her or his brilliant brain is a pure myth. In real life even the most brainy person needs exchange with other human beings and builds their knowledge production on that of others. Assigning shares in processes of knowledge production to individually identifiable persons (resp. in academic standards: a name) is in itself a result of establishing individuation as an ideal. Besides everything else Collective Memory-Work is a practical critique of exactly this ideal.

wandered off topic, how much to leave this to be and when and how to try to bring the discussion back to the focus of the meeting. I worried about their response: would they see this as an intervention by me as the researcher – so that I retained a control over them that I had hoped to cede, or would they see this intervention as an acceptable contribution by another participant to help keep the meeting 'on track'. This balancing act was also present in my delivery of the day-to-day logistics of the meetings. . . . Providing refreshments (tea, coffee, biscuits, fruit), ensuring a warm and welcoming venue (for example, by checking the heating was on, setting the room out, laying a tablecloth, tidying away afterwards), and being the first to arrive and the last to leave, promoted me as the lead or facilitator and upset my role as participant. . . . I recognize that my role was twofold: I was the researcher with most invested in the study, and I wanted to be a participant. It was my responsibility to looking into the welfare of the participants, to send emails before and after the meetings, to keep in touch since data generation finished" (Hammond 2013:211-3.)

It is no accident that in both of these reflections reference is made to investments. The cost for such projects is borne by the initiators. They invest time and money. Their investment is supposed to pay off a dividend. At the end there should be a diploma, a degree, an academic title, a door opener for gaining access to hopefully well-paid jobs. Just as for the students in Vienna potentially conflicting interests in exchange value and use value cut across each other. This is easily mirrored by the participants in the project: "We take part, but it is *your* project." Obviously that hits the nail on the head of the underlying structures. In this model participants can appropriate process and product only in parts.

Such projects offer possibilities for participants to gain new perspectives on otherwise all too familiar self-constructions, or to become conscious of linguistic patterns. The more time is given in a series of group meetings to working with the memory-scenes the better.<sup>45</sup> What is conceptually left out in the framework of such projects is the transfer of such insights into a critical appraisal of connections between theory and practice. What participants also lack in this model is the opportunity to gain a full competency regarding applications of Collective Memory-Work. From their perspective the method is reduced to telling, writing and extensively

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45 In the respective projects that are document the number of group meetings is usually between 6 and 12.

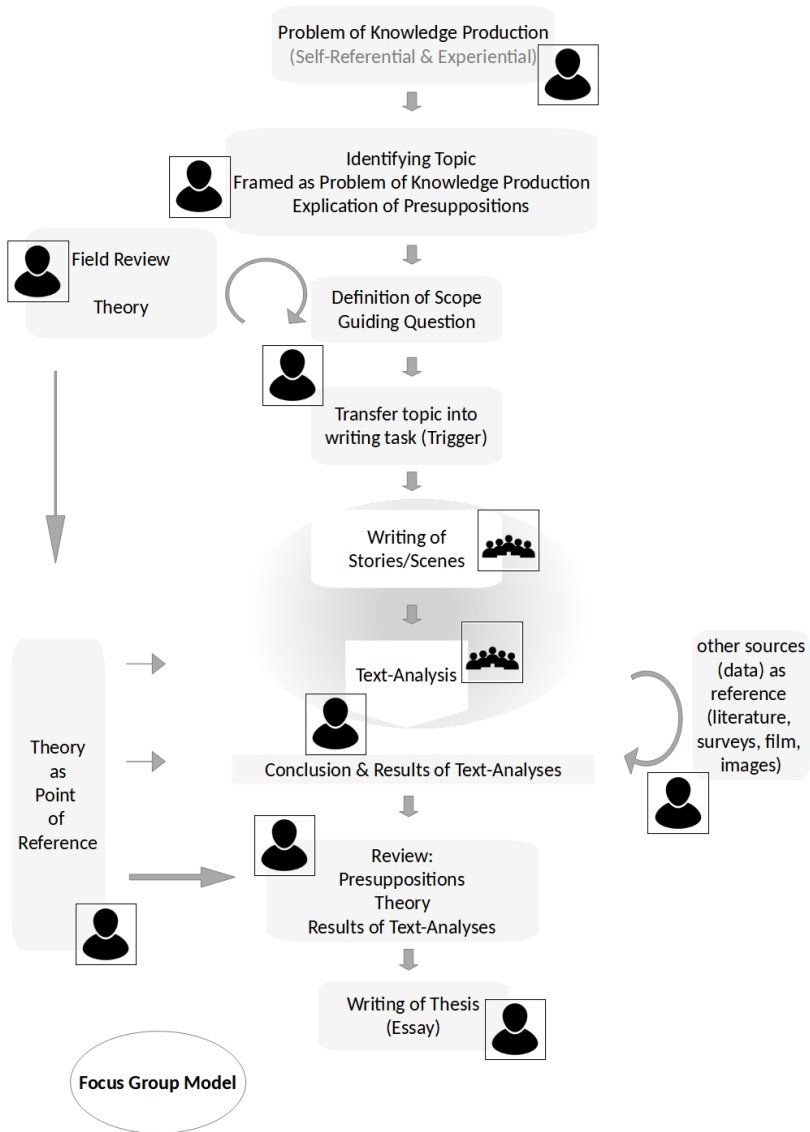
discussing stories. This may well be quite revealing and have effects beyond the group's meetings. Yet their experiences with the method remain fragmentary.

Such an appraisal should not be understood as a dismissal of the idea to use Collective Memory-Work for postgraduate research projects. Quite the opposite! It would be desirable to spread its use further into the enclaves of conservation of traditional academic approaches, and by doing so criticize the underlying structures as well. While it is not a simple numbers game it would still be worth testing if a transition of quantity into quality will be possible.

## **12.5 MODEL 5: FOCUS GROUP MODEL**

A step further still goes the model of applying Collective Memory-Work in form of focus groups. It is most clearly formulated in Corey Johnson's publication from 2018 where a list is presented of "Common Elements of Collective Memory Work" for "anyone considering using CMW in their work." This list includes:

- "Understand the philosophical tenets of CMW and justify its use for your study
- Determine and focus in on your central phenomenon
- Review the literature and craft your conceptual framework
- Write your positionality statement and make a plan for ongoing reflexivity
- Determine the memories that address your research question
- Decide on your sampling criteria
- Construct your writing prompt
- Recruit your sample and keep them informed every step
- Schedule and prepare for your focus groups
- Facilitate your focus groups



- Prepare the data for analysis and interpretation
- Conduct analysis and interpretation
- Wrestle with presentation
- Check for trustworthiness/credibility/authenticity"

(Johnson and Oakes 2018:130)

In the projects that follow model 4 the authors and initiators struggle for bringing into their projects as much as possible of the original intention of working collectively. In the focus group model this is of little concern. Before the participants ever meet they are informed about the writing topic. They bring the written scenes to the focus group meeting. There the scenes are read out, commented and discussed. With the end of the focus group meeting participation is coming to an end already again. The task of participants in such a model is similar to other applications of focus groups as a means of data generation for the purposes of analysis and interpretation by the researcher. The effect of such a conceptualization is a further reduction of possible learning experiences for participants.

There is not a lot left of the original intention in developing Collective Memory-Work. In the focus group model the tension between Collective Memory-Work and traditional academic standards is shifted into a direction of conforming adjustment. It is the easier option if compared to efforts to expand the scope of collectivity as a counter-force to individuation in academia. From the perspective of a postgraduate student who wishes to transit smoothly through this inevitable phase in their career the attractiveness of such a model is fully understandable. For the participants the potential for learning is however reduced to a bare minimum. From their perspective the focus group resembles a facilitated self-encounter group that meets once or twice for sharing personal stories. This may have certain learning effects, but even compared to those postgraduate research projects in which the groups meet regularly for a longer period and engage in text-analysis of their memory-scenes the focus group model is at best an appetizer.

Inspired by Collective Memory-Work, writing and talking about memory-scenes are also used as a method in once-off workshops in adult education settings outside academia. E.g., Ahmadi-Rinnerhofer & Pröstler's (2013) workshop runs over 2.5 hours with a number of up to 30 participants. There is an introduction, a phase of remembering in form of a short exchange of thoughts (resembling a free association in groups), a phase of writing

individual memories, a phase of discussing the individual memories in small groups of five or six participants, and a final plenary phase in which the small groups report back about their discussions. Karin Widerberg (2008:124) reports of similar adaptations in the context of an academic conference. The limitation in time and the number of participants account for a conceptually quite different experience on the side of participants than what is intended and made possible in the original version of *Collective Memory-Work*.

The focus group model is only one step away from eventually departing from working in (or with) a group at all. This has also been done already. In a series of projects in Austria the researchers asked participants in their studies to write texts in the genre of memory-scenes. These texts were then collected and consequently analyzed by the researchers (Egger 2012; Girardi 2012). In some cases short interviews were conducted with the authors of the texts to clarify elements in the story that were not immediately clear to the researcher (Kikl 2009; Kuntschke 2011). In these projects the participants did not come together as a group at all. The authors in these cases don't refer to *Collective Memory-Work* any more. They simply use the term memory-work, i.e. minus collective, as is quite common (not only) in the German speaking context (see above chapter 2).

Both the focus group model as well as collecting memory-texts can be quite suitable for a particular research project. But it is a problem, if applications that are so far apart, on the one hand these forms and on the other hand long term intensive collective learning projects, are depicted in the same terms. Here the effects of relinquishing the emphasis on the collective in the terminology in the early volumes of *Frauenformen*, and also in the English translations can be felt.

Furthermore, it is a problem if working with memories (minus collective) as a learning method is put on the same level as *Collective Memory-Work*. The learning potential differs greatly.

And it is eventually a problem of orientation, hence a problem of the respective practice understood as intervention and political action. "To me it seems quite strange to have others writing a memory-scene and then analyze it somewhere else and draw conclusions from it. The basis for me is that the researchers, the learners take their own experiences as their material, and they don't talk about 'the others.' It makes them change, and also the matter at hand changes in the process. The producers are actively involved in the process of deconstruction and analysis. . . . Another point is

the connection of the method to a desire to learn that is articulated by the people themselves, and actually the desire for a capacity to act. It is about gaining a better understanding of how we are part of our own subjectification within the social relations" (Melanie Stitz, in Stitz and Stier 2020:379). Neither the focus group model nor collecting memory-texts meet this request.



### 13 MYTHS MUDDLE UP MINDS

The Trade Union Building, Saturday, late morning:  
Maggie, Tina, John, Naomi, Stephen, Yaro, Suzan and Paul.

Suzan: I am stuck with the thing about the memories. The Australian collective writes in *Emotion and Gender* we should dig out the earliest memory on a given topic, kind of back to childhood.

Maggie: That would not be possible with our topic.

Suzan: Why not? We started with expectations of expectations. We could have just as well written our earliest memory of expectations of expectations.

Naomi: For instance, the first time when I did something of which I thought I should do it because I thought others expect me to do it.

Stephen: Maybe so, but we concentrated on workplaces.

Suzan: Of course. I am just saying: Would we come to the same results if we had started with our earliest memories?

Paul: This idea that the earliest memories have a particular meaning is connected to the background of the group in Australia. There is a part of psychoanalytic tracing in it. And we cannot deny that we continue to carry forward over time stories that function as anchor for our self-constructions.

Maggie: We carry them forward, but we also reshuffle them. And for our aim of detecting self-constructions it is not essential whether I dig out the first or the last memory. Maybe even the most current one is best because it is closest to my present situation.

Paul: Fascinating suggestion. Frigga Haug has made attempts with students to write memories of the future. She called it *Anticipatory Memory-Work*.<sup>46</sup> They wrote stories about how for them a successful day in the future would look like.

Suzan: OK., but I still wonder would the results be the same?

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46 Haug (2016:239)

Yaro: Do you not arrive at different results all the time? Isn't every project unique, and can't be repeated in exactly the same fashion?

Paul: I would see it like that too. Nevertheless there are recurring motifs. If that wasn't the case we could not even orientate ourselves towards a given topic. More important than the time span that we bridge back in remembering is what we do with the stories.

Naomi: Exactly that is where I have a question. In the workshops in those Danish adult education centers, or also in the seminar with Michele Byers the participants write their stories, but they are not analyzed. At least not in the way we did it, deconstruction, reconstruction, topical transfer and all that. And then I ask myself, well, what is going on? Apples or pears, memory-work or memory-work?

Paul: It is of course a difference whether you read out your story and have ten minutes of people commenting on it, or you work together with a distinct text-analysis template for two hours or longer. You need to see what type of groups these are. How do they come together? What is their aim? It doesn't make sense to throw them into the same bucket. Some could say: "You do it all wrong if you don't deconstruct the texts. You will only find out what you know already in advance. Do you not want to break free at some point?" And the others could answer: "You and your deconstruction, completely over the top. What in fact do you want? We do what is good for us. A person is neither an object for dissection nor a little brick house to take apart." Such is a dead debate.

Naomi: But the analysis dissects texts, not people.

Paul: Some think that the text-analysis pulls to pieces stories that they like for exactly the form in which they tell them.

Suzan: Politically it is regressive if stories become sacred object. Building myths muddles up minds.

Paul: Politically it is also important to find potential points of contact. I understood that Naomi's question aims at finding the right praxis.

Naomi: And criticizing the wrong one.

Paul: But for right and wrong you need anchor points. Right per se is already wrong, just as much as wrong per se is wrong.

John: If you say right per se is wrong and wrong per se also then you contradict yourself because you could only say that if there was a right per

se. But as you say that doesn't exist it is wrong if you say right per se is wrong.

Paul: Goodness me, didn't you once say you prefer thinking straight? Anyway, you are right, first it is necessary to clarify standpoints.

Maggie: Standpoints are not something made up randomly. You don't change them like underpants either. They are connected to circumstances, social position, interests and their relation to wishes, hopes, desires, expectations. These are the conditions, the breeding ground on which we produce the reasoning that underpins meaning. And the patterns of reasoning that we come up with mirror the contradictions in the whole *mélange*.

Paul: And in Collective Memory-Work we search for the patterns of our dealing with the contradictions in those conditions for reasoning.

Naomi: But that won't work if we get together, exchange a few stories, maybe pat our shoulders in solidarity and back home.

Paul: As I said, that's why you need to look at the background of the groups. How do they get together in the first place and what do they want.

Tina: You also need to take into account the institutional context. Wasn't the workshops in Denmark only two half-days?

Paul: Correct, and Michele Byers has scheduled only one day for it in her seminar. There is not time enough for more. Of course they could do an example of a text-analysis with the entire template. But that would only render the whole thing into a kind of crash-course on Collective Memory-Work.

Maggie: If we see the differences in dealing with the texts, is the notion of a family of methods still applicable?

Paul: It fits when you talk about things like Collective Biography, or Doris Allhutter's mind scripting. But take Michele Byers' seminar. What she does is Collective Biography, an adaptation already. But she says herself it is only a part of the entire method, a short version born out of lack of time, not a methodologically well-founded adaptation.

Yaro: I also see the short version in the focus group model from the US that is about using the method in academic research projects. All steps of the method are included. But the work in the group is reduced to a once-off meeting. The people come in with texts they have written already, read them out, hear comments, and go home again.

Stephen: Reading and commenting is something we do ourselves, for example later today in the afternoon.

Yaro: All fine, but for us this is only a first step into working with the texts. There it is for those who wrote them beginning and end in one. Everything else beforehand and afterwards is done by the researcher. When I read it I thought, wow, Collective Memory-Work light.

Paul: Are you saying it is a bit like false labeling?

Yaro: No, I'm sure there is a genuine interest. It is just that in the concept the idea what a collective is or could be remains pretty shallow.

Tina: All right, but what is your question?

Yaro: What does that have to do with learning? The title of the book is *Collective Memory Work. A Methodology for Learning with and from Lived Experience*. It is sold directly as a learning method.

Suzan: Methodology and method are two different things.

Yaro: They are not too concerned about that in the book. But it is not important for my question. I mean, who learns what in such an arrangement? Or also, who in fact can learn something in it?

Paul: Focus groups are a well-known method in research. The aim in them is not for participants to learn something, but for the researchers to learn something from what is said by the participants. Their conversation, contributions in discussion, what arguments they put forward, how they position themselves and how positions change, all that can be recorded and afterwards used for analysis and interpretation by the researchers. Of course there is always something happening for the participants too. But that is not the main aim. Focus groups are not a learning arrangement, or if they happen to be it is more like collateral damage.

Naomi: I'm not sure of that. During my studies I conducted a project with teenagers on ecological anxieties. We did a group discussion at the start of the project. That was clearly related to learning.

Paul: And did you do something else?

Naomi: Sure, we had two drama workshops together.

Paul: Then your group discussion is part of a longer process. That is a different concept. The focus group is a once-off meeting. The aim is for the researchers to find answers. The participants discuss among each other. In doing so they will always gain something new, but that is a side effect.

Maggie: It depends on the topic. Focus groups were developed in consumer research. Should the new washing-up liquid be colored in yellow or in green? What do housewives say?

Paul: I hear the irony. But it isn't all black and white either. For example, focus groups as a means of research on political attitudes is not such a bad idea.

John: In all honesty, if we do Collective Memory-Work we discuss in a group and we focus on a topic. That would make us a focus group.

Yaro: If you see it this way then you could also call our blubber during lunch break a focus group.

Maggie: And the embarrassments in the exchange of school memories in our reunion meetings would be memory work.

Yaro: Labels seem to always be a problem.

Paul: To get final clarity into that it would require a copyright on the name of a method.

Suzan: Let us call it the *Frauenformen Method* instead of Collective Memory-Work. Then we write a manual with a fixed procedure. Bingo. We have created a new church. And everyone who doesn't do it as we want will be fired. Exactly opposite to the initial intention. Wasn't it about calling on the many, dissemination?

Stephen: In my opinion the idea needs to be defended.

Suzan: But not by a dogma.

Stephen: No by praxis. What we do here for the last half a year should be disseminated.

John: Before we drown in self-indulgence maybe better another question. I brought with me a quote. "In this space of multiple mo(ve)ments we experienced our bodies, not as fixed biographical entities located in time and space, but as fluid, time-traveling nomadic becomings, both acting upon, and being acted upon, by stories generated within the group."<sup>47</sup> Who in everyday life speaks of fluid, time-traveling nomadic becoming in spaces of multiple movements? If you heave around pots and dishes in the early shift in the hospital canteen, if you carry all sorts of stuff from one shelf to another one in the storehouse, if you mechanically push spokes into wheels for hours . . .

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47 Gannon et al. (2014:72; see above, chapter 3)

Maggie: Is that your question?

John: Of course it is not. My question is, what does it tell us if Collective Memory-Work is spoken about in that way?

Tina: The language that is used there is not a necessary feature of the method. It says something about the situation and the situatedness of the authors. But I can well understand your question. It speaks of trenches between people. If academics don't manage to put their insights and knowledge into a language that is commonly understood they don't need to be surprised if they are dismissed as nerdy.

Maggie: Language is politics, isn't it?

Tina: It builds bridges or it expands trenches.

John: If it is about digging trenches, nomadic becoming is a linguistic excavator.

Paul: Your quote is from an essay that was written with a particular audience in mind. Language is not simply bad because it comes along as different to what we are used. Take poems, some adore them, others run away as fast as it gets.

Stephen: But shouldn't you try to express yourself as clear as possible?

Paul: Some matter is complex and in that case also the brain that insists on common understanding needs to work a little bit.

John: That is not what I mean. I only think, what does it tell us about Collective Memory-Work. And I hear you saying, not so much. I can live with that.

Maggie: But it may say something about the circumstances in which the people who write like that live day-in, day-out. And your referring to the hospital canteen, the store and the workbench are valuable. The trenches would need to be filled, not dug out even deeper.

Stephen: As union rep that is something I ask myself a long time already. Is there not a way to build bridges between different members of the workforce? We have public servants, ordinary workers, people on temporary contracts, consultants, trainees and what all. Then there are the political board members and the public mandate. For all I know of Collective Memory-Work I would say it could make some bulbs light up. But when I speak with colleagues I frequently hear: "What do we get from this?" And when I start to explain, capacity for action and so, I recognize how I lose them. Recently one of the young colleagues in the pension

section told me in her best business jargon: "Results; you get me? Tangible results, nothing else." How can I make it clear to her that reflecting on her own patterns of reasoning leads to increased capacities for action?

Tina: Learning is what the learners do. You construct yourself in the position of teacher. She will understand when she wants to understand. But if you don't try to make it clear she will not have a chance to understand at all. My advice, keep going.

Paul: If you consider using Collective Memory-Work in a concrete firm, or in a department in the county administration then you need to see the point of departure of the staff.

Stephen: I know that. It is a lot easier if internal hierarchies don't play into a group. That is one of the reasons why our people prefer external seminars.

Paul: Maybe the approach of Doris Allhutter could be interesting for you. Collective Memory-Work with an external facilitator who takes on an exonerating role.

Stephen: In the pre-schools they have reflective team-supervision. We once discussed with members in the urban planning section whether that is something they would also like to do. But their enthusiasm was rather limited.

Maggie: Collective Memory-Work is different to reflective team-supervision. We have a couple of schools where teachers discuss about school development plans. I always think that would be exactly the area for using Collective Memory-Work. Be it at the start to lay down foundations, or also as a reflective loop in the middle to clarify positions, standpoints. That would surely be great for your urban planners too.

Stephen: We'll see, I keep at it. Further questions?

Maggie: I wonder about the effects for the individuals. Collective Memory-Work, and then? There are reports where people speak of massive changes for themselves. We can't do science ever again as we did it before. It opened up completely new perspectives. We realized that we live in error. De-romanticized and on our merry ways. How many speak about effects in this way? And how does Collective Memory-Work relate to transformative learning?

Yaro: How many, we can find out for ourselves. Who of you believes to be on the way to completely new horizons?

Naomi: In our training courses we worked with text and the transfer into acting. But such a detailed dissecting work I haven't done before. I'm sure that will stay with me.

Suzan: New perspectives, sure. But is that such a massive change? I'm not sure.

John: You are for more than 20 years in feminist circles. What would be a massive change? The effects need to be seen in relation to starting positions.

Tina: For me it is a step back forwards. In the past I was a member of a literature circle where we read stuff on feminism and Marxism. The people from that time are scattered all over the place, there is no structure left. What we do here comes close to what that circle did. I find a connection to my own political history. That is the step back. And I find a connection to you. That is the step forwards. Maybe the real effect of Collective Memory-Work is less on increased capacity for action, maybe it is more an increase in connections.

Stephen: Maybe increased capacity for action is based on increased capacity for connecting?

Maggie: That didn't dawn on me, but of course, on the level of intense shared practice already. And then obviously also on the level of new perspective for connections.

John: You mean after a project finished?

Maggie: Yes, new perspectives open up new spaces for action.

John: What did you mean by transformation?

Maggie: In the US they often speak of transformative learning. You find that in parts also in the literature on Collective Memory-Work. There is even one adaptation that is labeled *narrative transformation*.

Paul: But that was in a German context. Bettina Törpel wanted to find out with a group in the IT-sector whether the method can be helpful in product design and the development of work means.<sup>48</sup> She refers with the term to the experience that during the process the narrative of the story is modified, i.e. transformed. And at the same time this has a transformative potential in the life of the participants.

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48 Törpel (2004)



Suzan: Should you not rather say, participants transform the narrative and also themselves. Thus it is active intervention by concrete persons and not mystic fateful happenings from neverland?

Maggie: Correct. But my question is, how does Collective Memory-Work stand in relation to theories of transformative learning? A central figure in it is Jack Mezirow.<sup>49</sup> He holds that the most meaningful transformations require a critique of the learners' basic assumptions about themselves and the world. Transformative learning is concerned with rules, categories, language, ideologies, standards, values, religion, all sorts of norms that need to be put under scrutiny.

Tina: Isn't it in a way also a doctrine of adult learning based on rational thought and finding the most rational decision for a course of action?

Maggie: In a way, yes, it aims at reason and argumentation. The better argument shall guide the action. But so far I haven't found anything that would attend to the relation between transformative learning and Collective Memory-Work.

Naomi: Is not every learning transformative?

Tina: If learning does not change anything then it isn't learning. Transformative learning then would be something like red poppies or black coal. But it is a term that sells as neutral and progressive without heavy political freight, as would be the case for emancipatory learning.

Paul: That reminds me of the connection between method and movement. Collective Memory-Work is the result of collective efforts of women within the context of the women's movement and the socialist movement. It was an answer and in intervention in struggles over political positions.

Tina: You mean positions of the left in Marxist organizations?

Paul: That too, but not only. What I mean is, the method needs to be seen not as the invention of a genius brain but as an expression of a particular collective desire. It aims at liberation. But desire for liberation roots in a specific historical situation. And if the original development of the method required the movement, what remains of the method if the movement disappears?

Suzan: Does not the fact that you as a man can ask such a question already bear witness that the method has effects beyond the movement?

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49 See, e.g. Mezirow (1991, 2009)

Tina: And whether the movement disappeared or not is a matter of dispute among women. The movement moves. Maybe all that tells us is that the method needs to move also? Or else, whether we want it or not, it moves anyway. Or even better, it is moved because it will always be adapted anew by people to their respective situation.

Suzan: Collective Memory-Work is not the only result of the women's movement. There are so many in fact. Take Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography, that is another example for a method that is underpinned by a desire for liberation. It is about appropriation, mapping the terrain for a better positioning and developing possibilities for action.

Yaro: And the effects of one movement moves others in other movements. Take the concept of militant research in Operaism. The aim is also liberation. Researching conditions as political intervention. Is that not as well part of what we do here? Do we not create increased capacity for connection and in consequence increased capacity for action?

Paul: I don't question that. But what does it mean for processes that are possible if Collective Memory-Work is used outside of the confines of a movement?

Stephen: You mean in a regular university seminar?

Paul: Or in adult education centers, or on-the-job training, or, or, or. Does it not become a dry run?

Marion: Are you not the one who constantly argues for the method to be used in all sorts of environments?

Paul: So what! Am I to shut up then and not question it?

Suzan: Not at all, but do you not have an answer already?

Paul: I would like to know your answers.

Naomi: For me that goes the same direction as Stephen's problem earlier. How should I get to know something if there is no-one to show me where to find it? The method points out a way to see the world. Even to only realize that this way exists is already a massive gain. No matter whether I see myself as part of a movement or not. I don't care where that happens, in a university seminar or on-the-job training.

Tina: I think essential in it is to see yourself as part of the problem for becoming part of the solution. That is also the last word. We draw the curtain here, no more questions. Instead we take care of the fluid time-traveling nomadic meltover of butter biscuits and hot chocolate.



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# **READER COLLECTIVE MEMORY-WORK**

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The Reader Collective Memory-Work  
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